Guitar
MAGAZINE

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ISSUE 367
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ACOUSTASONIC

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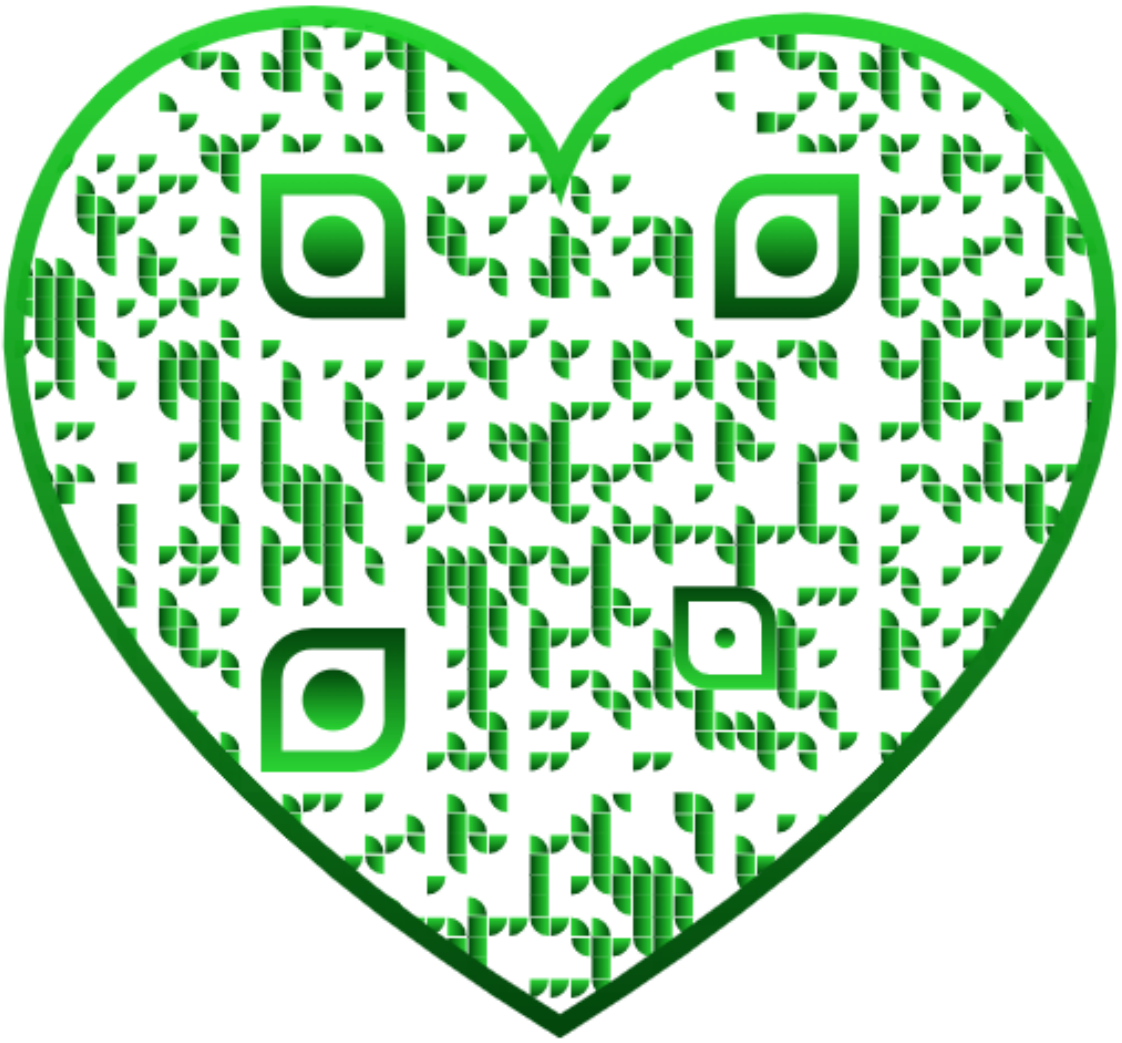

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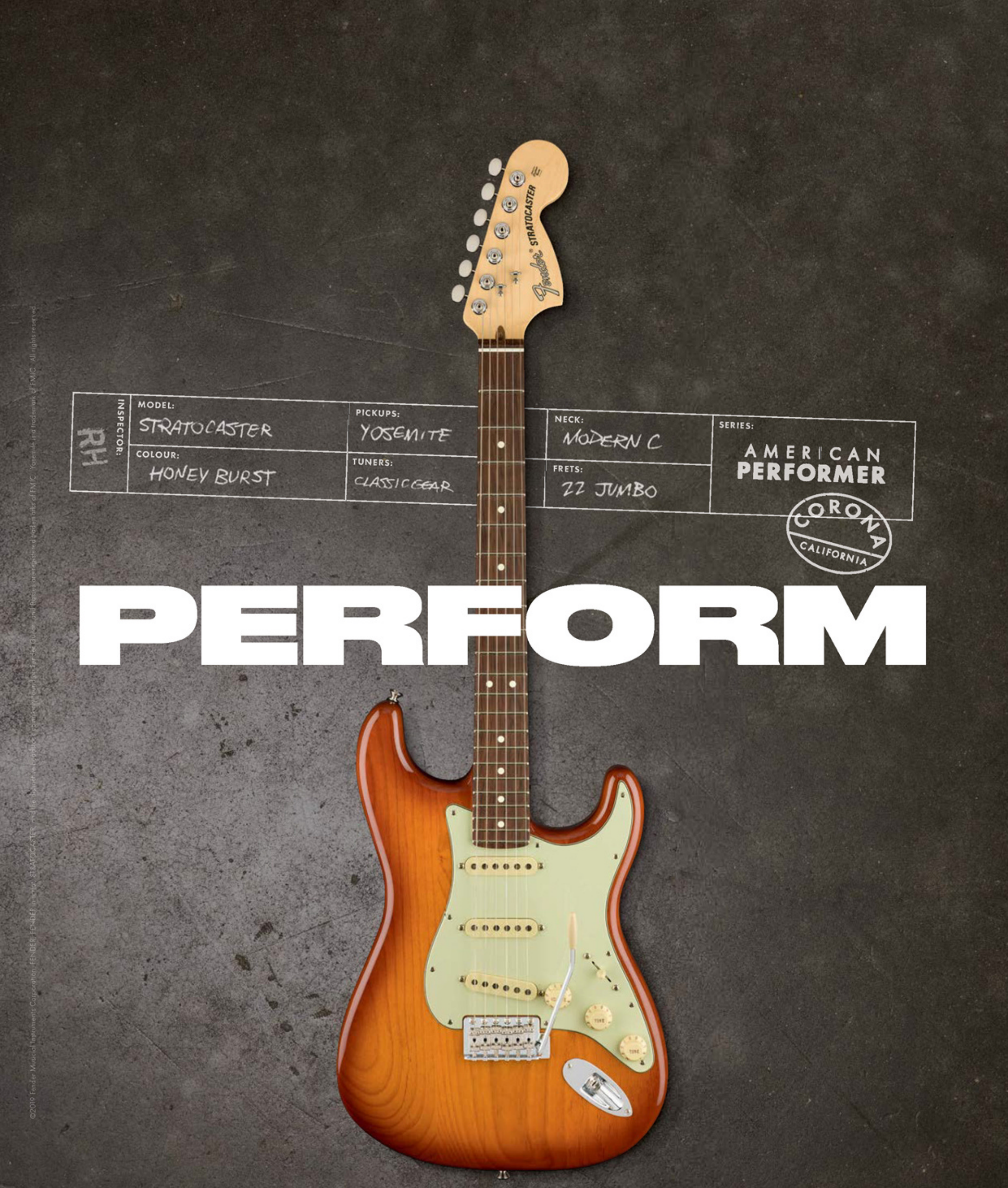

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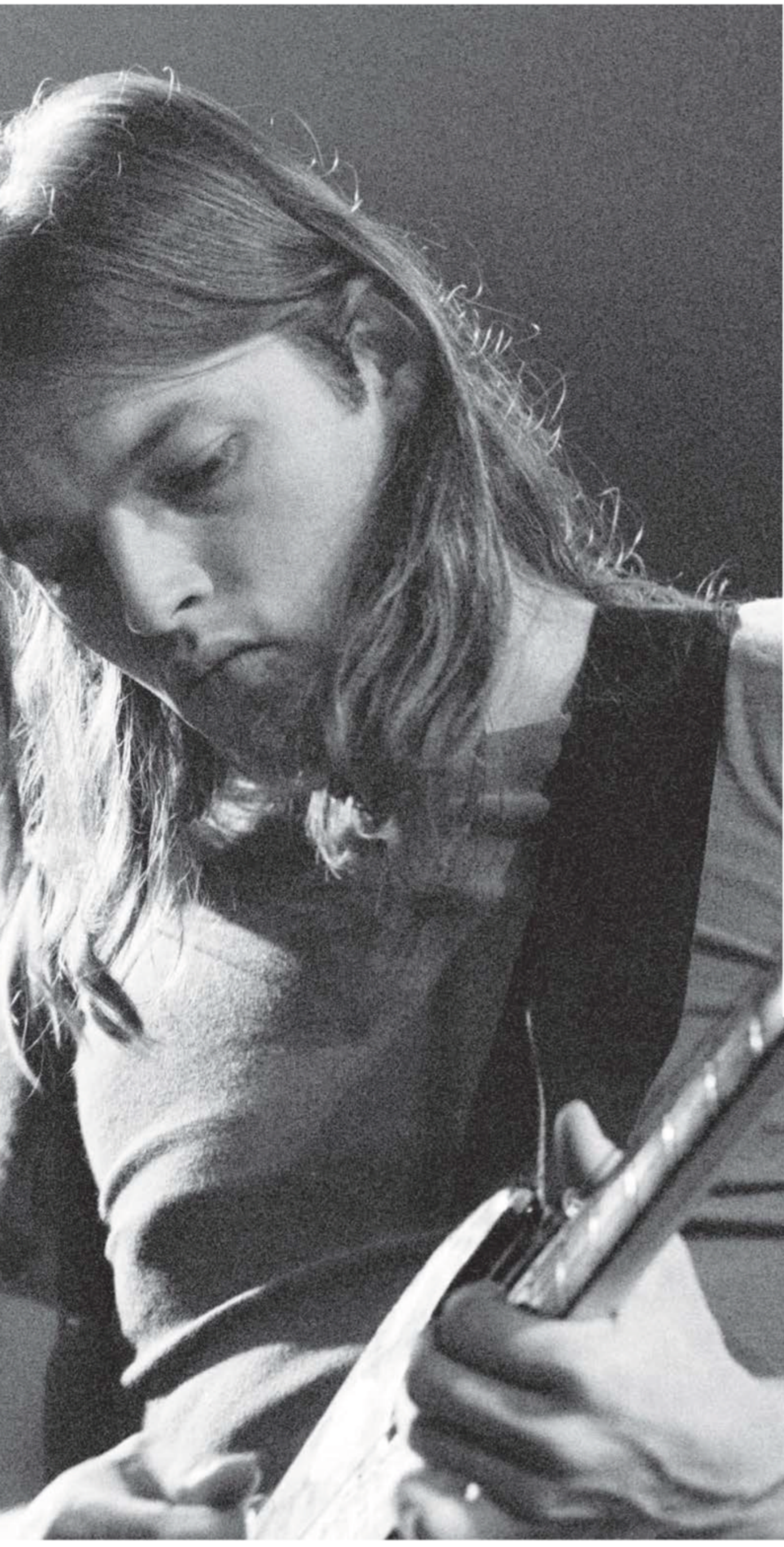

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EDITOR'S LETTER

THE NAME GAME

Are we a quarter of the way into 2019 already? It only seems like a few days ago that we were heading out to the NAMM Show in California to see what the guitar industry had in store for us during the year ahead. You can find a sparkling array of new gear from the show floor over at *Guitar.com* and in this month's magazine, we put some of it through its paces.

Resplendent on the cover, the headline act is Fender's bold new hybrid, the American Acoustasonic Telecaster. With a broad palette of vivid acoustic and electric-guitar tones on offer, the Acoustasonic might open a few musical doors *and* allow you to get away with taking one less guitar to the gig. Turn to our reviews section from p93 onwards to read our in-depth review and check out even more hot new gear from the likes of Blackstar, Orange, EarthQuaker Devices, Electro-Harmonix and more.

The show itself was the most positive we've attended in many years. Not only did Gibson return to Anaheim in force, but perhaps the biggest story of NAMM 2019 originated in Northern Ireland with the news that George Lowden has teamed up with the biggest pop star in the world right now to launch a new range of affordable acoustics. The Sheeran by Lowden instruments are set to be manufactured in Downpatrick (just like Lowden's wonderful high-end guitars) and their development has been a real labour of love for Ed and George. Find out what they had to say about the process on p44, where they join Gibson CEO JC Curleigh and John Mayer in our round-up of conversations from the Anaheim show.

While we're in name-dropping mode, fans of Les Pauls are particularly well served this month. Starting on p66, The Collection features jaw-dropping images of what might have been the very first Burst to arrive on UK shores back in the early 1960s, while on p80, Tony Bacon charts the history of Gibson's finest solidbody with contributions from bona-fide rock legends Jimmy Page and Billy Gibbons. Enjoy the issue!

Chris Vinnicombe
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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

MOD FATHER

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I just stumbled across your 25 Essential Gibson Les Paul Mods And Upgrades on Guitar.com and it is without a doubt the best, most coherent, and succinct writing I have ever seen to cover these extremely commonly asked questions/enquiries.

I just wanted to take the time to tell you that I was extremely impressed and will now look for more stuff from you. I'm just one of the many guitar enthusiasts out there, and I'm barely good enough to even call myself a 'player'. However, I will eagerly pass on your site to my guitar-playing friends as they should check it out, too – thank you!

Mike S, VIA EMAIL

Well, thanks for your kind words, Mike, we're glad you enjoyed the article, but rest assured, if you're playing guitar, you're a player – it doesn't matter what level of ability you're at, you're part of the club…

SPECIAL TREATMENT

Dear *GM*, your latest issue and the interview with him inside reminds me that I really expected Gibson to announce a production model of the Gary Clark Jr SG at NAMM this year. The 2019 SG Specials came close and the metallic-burgundy paintjob is enticing, but I'm holding on for TV Yellow and three pickups.

M CARDWELL, VIA EMAIL

We agree – it's a killer guitar, but Gibson hasn't decided to make a production version yet. However, the new TV Yellow Les Paul Special introduced at NAMM is pretty special, as is the Vibrola-toting '61 SG… They'll keep us going!

THE SUMMER OF '63

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, thanks for your article on the 1961 Hofner Verithin last month – it brought back some memories of the summer of 1963. A schoolfriend, a couple of years older than me, sold me his pre-war German 'no name' archtop to finance the purchase of a new guitar. A week later, he said that he was bringing it to the school and had arranged for himself and another pupil to use the stage in the gym during a lunch hour.

On the day, I wandered towards the gym and before I arrived I could hear a medley of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley riffs. On entering, I could see Mark, my friend, trading licks on a brand-new red Verithin with the other pupil, who was also playing a Verithin. They were using the two inputs of a Watkins Clubman. Nothing unusual about two young guys playing guitar in the school gym – except that the 'other pupil' happened to be Labi Siffre. Interestingly, the school motto, when translated from the Latin, is 'from the smallest beginnings.' Well, it was certainly true for one of us!

CHRIS STEVENSON, VIA EMAIL

FROM FACEBOOK

Not at all sure about the Acoustasonic model. It's quite pricey, too. But give Fender credit for trying something new.

NICK WEBB

I was lucky enough to cross paths with Jim Dunlop a few times over the years. Some man, and his stories were effing tremendous. The guitar world and the world in general is a poorer place for his passing.

HUGH MCCAFFERY

People being snippy about this Sheeran by Lowden thing is odd – it's about songs, it's about music. That man has written more popular songs than anyone here, I'm sure. More power to him, and to the kids he's inspired to be interested in music, and who now have a decent instrument to yearn for.

TIM O'DONNELL

ELEVEN

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Lowden
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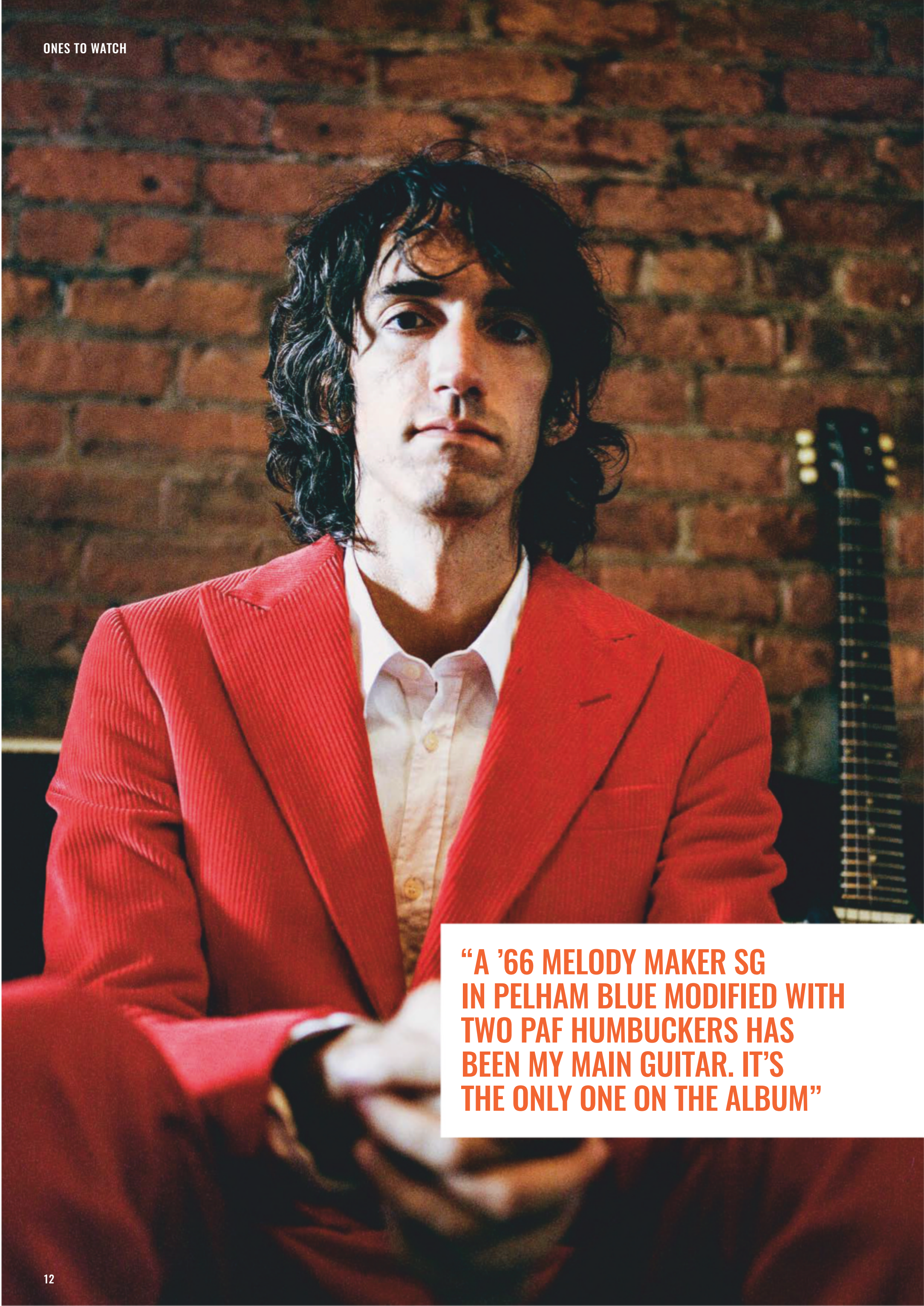

"A '66 MELODY MAKER SG IN PELHAM BLUE MODIFIED WITH TWO PAF HUMBUCKERS HAS BEEN MY MAIN GUITAR. IT'S THE ONLY ONE ON THE ALBUM"

ONES TO WATCH

DELICATE STEVE @DELICATESTEVE

INTERVIEW HUW BAINES

The New Jersey guitarist and session man on soulful vocal influences, riding his instruments, all-star studio gear – and encounters with a vintage-guitar collecting guru…

When did you first get into the guitar?
"It was a fake plastic guitar my grandmother bought for me for Christmas. I would just slide around on the floor with it."

Did any guitarists light a fire under you?
"At first, no. Getting my own taste was happening when I was starting to play and later on, at 16, 17, 18 I started to get into Frank Zappa, Duane Allman, Carlos Santana, Robert Fripp, Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix…"

Was there a scene you wanted to be part of?
"Around the time of getting into guitar, I was also getting into recording. I didn't write my own music, but there was this band I ended up recording that I would have given anything to be in. The singer, who went on to be one of my best friends, read my mind and asked me to play guitar. That was the beginning of my career in this local scene. We got a manager in New York and started playing in the city, we got a major-label deal and, classic mid-2000s scenario, recorded an album and it got shelved."

Was session work difficult to adapt to?
"No, I always thought I was going to be backing up a singer. There's an interesting differentiation between my early days as a guitar player, deeply inspired by guitarists, and then Delicate Steve, where my sound became inspired by vocal styles like Stevie Wonder, Sam Cooke: powerful soul voices."

The studio you used in Woodstock for your new LP houses Robbie Robertson's amp and an Oberheim owned by Freddie Mercury…
"I didn't even know going into the studio, which was even cooler. The owner, before he left me the keys, was like: 'This was Freddie Mercury's synth, I bought it 10 years ago off his old limo driver.' He showed me the flightcase from Queen. It tripped me out. I'm a huge Band fan and Robbie fan. It's a reverent feeling. I plugged in and didn't change any of the settings, just threw it up and used it the whole time. It hit me between takes; I'd be staring at this keyboard imagining Freddie's fingers playing it."

What guitars were in heavy rotation?
"I have a friend in New York who knows more about guitars than anybody I know; this Rain Man-level wisdom. He buys them for nothing, knows the value, and fixes them up. He got, I think, a '66 Melody Maker SG in Pelham Blue, modified with two PAF humbuckers. He got it for like $900 and was like: 'Dude, these pickups are worth a grand each.' I convinced him to sell me that and it's been my main guitar since. It's the only one I used on the album."

Delicate Steve's new album, *Till I Burn Up* is out 1 March 2019 on Anti Records

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

LUKE SITAL-SINGH A GOLDEN STATE

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The talented folk singer-songwriter talks us through some guitar highlights from his third album…

A Golden State marks a new sense of direction for Luke Sital-Singh. Following two full albums alongside six EPs, the singer-songwriter chose to relocate from Bristol to Los Angeles with his wife following the completion of his latest record. Recorded at Jackpot Studios in Portland, Oregon, famously set up by Elliott Smith and utilised by the likes of R.E.M. and The Decemberists, Sital-Singh worked with Tommy McLaughlin to create a "big and warming" album, using vintage ribbon mics and old Harmony acoustics. We spoke to the transatlantic troubadour about his five guitar highlights from the album.

ALMOST GONE

"This song has a guitar moment that brings me full circle back to my first EP. In the latter choruses, I strum the acoustics with a paintbrush very softly. Loads of brush guitars layered up give a really nice texture to the recording. Dave Lynch, at Electric Zoo Studios, who produced my first EP, taught me that trick on an early song of mine, *Honest Man*."

SILHOUETTE

"I was listening to a lot of Mac DeMarco when I wrote this album. I always marvel at the people who can write feelgood music that doesn't stink of cheese. He can, and I want to! I'd also been noticing how guitarists like Mac and my hero Ryan Adams use chorus in their sound. I'd never given chorus a look before, so I bought an Analog Man Mini Chorus and wrote the main riff."

THE LAST DAY

"I love a sparkly, clean guitar sound. It's mostly the only tone I use, so I'm always trying to find new tools to nail that perfect clean. The lovely people at Benson Amps loaned us one of their Monarch combos and we used it on this. From the moment I plugged in, it sounded gorgeous. Just my '64 reissue Tele straight into the amp."

LOVE IS HARD ENOUGH WITHOUT THE WINTER

"This song contains the first guitar solo I've ever put to tape. I'd never put myself out there as a great guitar player, but over the years, my playing has actually become pretty good. I rarely push myself beyond C and F chords, so it felt good to finally throw a tasteful solo in there. Armed with my trusty Gibson ES-120 with flat wounds into my Audio Kitchen Little Chopper amp, it was recorded in my kitchen."

LOS ANGELES

"I lost count of how many times I recorded the acoustic parts on this one. The demo was recorded on whatever guitar was closest to me at the time, which was my beaten-up old Harmony Sovereign, but I always planned to re-record it again properly. I have a beautiful Lowden O-35 that I'm in love with. I tried it on that, didn't sound right. So, I bought a rare Lowden dreadnought D-32 – yeah, I like Lowdens. I tried that, didn't sound right, either! I tried every guitar I owned, until finally going back to the Harmony. There's something about that guitar. It just does its thing, doesn't make a fuss. It gets outshone by fancier guitars, but it's always there ready and waiting and never lets me down." G

Luke Sital-Singh's new album, *A Golden State*, is out 5 April on Raygun Records via The Orchard

This month's essential listening for guitar lovers…

VAMPIRE WEEKEND
Harmony Hall

A buoyant anthem with baroque acoustics and piano that leans neatly into a Grateful Dead-esque crunchy solo. New LP, *Father Of The Bride*, is one to look out for.

PINK FLOYD
Comfortably Numb

With David Gilmour set to auction guitars including his iconic '69 Black Strat in June at Christie's in New York, here's a reminder of one the best guitar solos of all time.

BETTER OBLIVION COMMUNITY CENTER
Dylan Thomas

Phoebe Bridgers and Conor Oberst have revealed a surprise collaboration LP with single *Dylan Thomas* – featuring a guitar cameo from Yeah Yeah Yeahs' Nick Zinner.

REESE WYNANS AND FRIENDS
Crossfire

The former Stevie Ray Vaughan And Double Trouble keys player reveals his debut solo album, *Sweet Release*, produced by Joe Bonamassa and featuring a host of guest players, including Kenny Wayne Shepherd.

SNARKY PUPPY
Xavi

The lead single from the Grammy-winning instrumental fusion band's forthcoming album, *Immigrance*, features fluid, fuzzy guitars and basslines that root themselves deeply in your psyche.

LUKE SITAL-SINGH
Los Angeles

The subject of this issue's Album Spotlight on the previous page, Sital-Singh's latest single is as warm and hazy as the West Coast city that he recently choose to relocate to with his wife.

CIRCA WAVES
Me, Myself And Hollywood

The Liverpool band's latest offering from album number three is a more sombre affair than their usual output, with arpeggiated guitars and scuzzy, reversed lead lines.

DELICATE STEVE
Selfie Of A Man

Steve Marion's recording persona is the subject of this month's Ones To Watch over on p12, and the lead single from *Till I Burn Up* is a head-bobbing, drum-machine-and-guitar-driven instrumental.

RODRIGO Y GABRIELA
Echoes

On forthcoming LP *Mettavolution*, the acoustic duo have recorded a rendition of Pink Floyd's *Echoes*. Over almost 20 minutes, it reimagines the original with guitar percussion and tactile effects.

CHERRY GLAZERR
Wasted Nun

Charging powerchords with a pop sheen, Cherry Glazerr's latest single marries the grunge of Courtney Love's Hole with the intensity of modern pop. New LP *Stuffed & Ready* is quietly receiving rave reviews.

BOB MOULD
Lost Faith

The Hüsker Dü frontman's 13th solo album, *Sunshine Rock*, is out now and the lead single is a rampant and uplifting track, full of socially conscious lyrics that shed light on mental fractures caused by the media.

JADE BIRD
I Get No Joy

After announcing her self-titled debut album back in January, the folk songstress has released a single. It's an upbeat rocker, laced with acoustic guitars, shakers and a chorus reminiscent of Alanis Morissette.

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Thanks to our friends over at Zilla, we're giving you the chance to win a ported 1x12! Resplendent in black-on-green Tolex with an oxblood grille, and featuring a Celestion G12H-74 Creamback, this sleek cabinet is a sight for sore eyes.

Dimensions are 560 x 410 x 300mm, but despite being a small and portable cabinet, the ported nature of the cab provides deeper bass response without retracting any clarity, giving you the impression of playing through a closed back 4x12. Zilla cabs offer excellent value for money, an enormous variety of customisable options, looks – including over 40 different variations of standard Tolex, plus custom options – and portability.

To find out more about the Zilla Cabs Ported 1x12, read our review over on Guitar.com – and to be in with a chance of winning, simply head to the link below and answer the following question:
guitar.com/news/competitions/zillacabs

How many variations of standard Tolex does Zilla Cabs offer?
A 45 **B** 40 **C** 100

The closing date for the competition is 12:00am GMT, 1 April 2019. Good luck!

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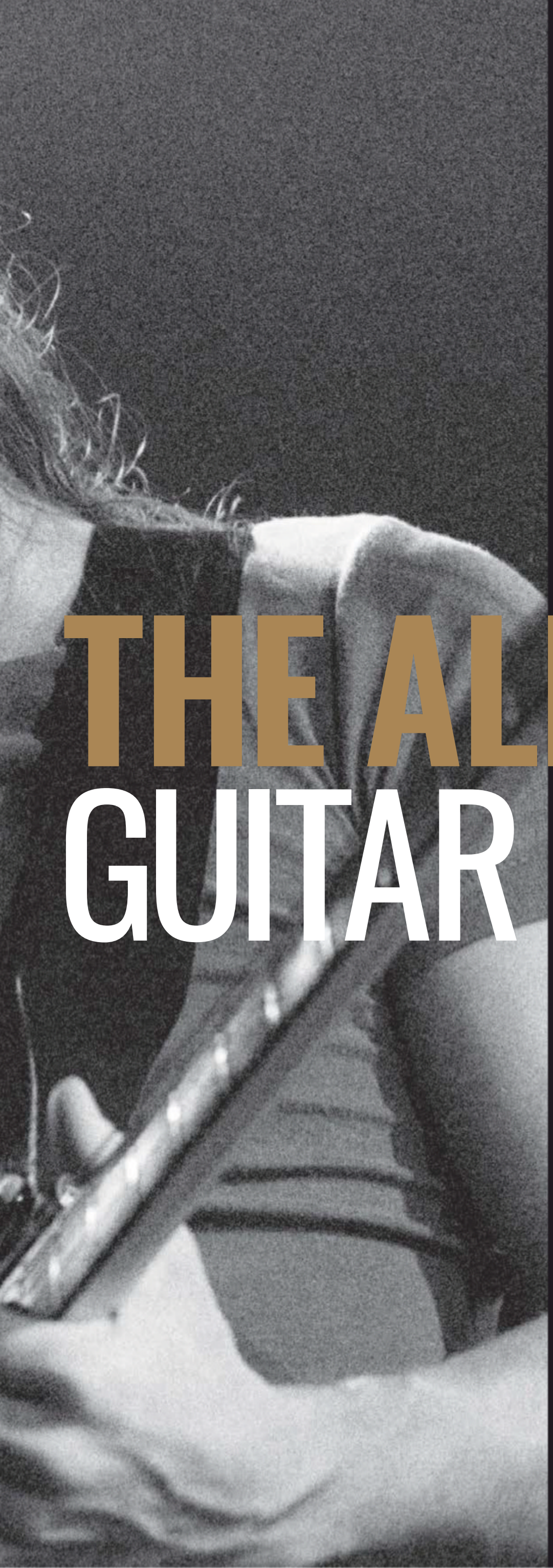

THE ALL-STAR GUITAR LESSON

No matter where we are in our playing lives, every guitar player wants to get that little bit better. So here, we present some collected words of wisdom from the rockstars who are out there on stage every night in front of hundred, thousands or even tens of thousands of fans. Whether it's cleaning up your technique, sharpening up your soloing, writing better songs or improving your feel, these insider tips from the great and good of the guitar world will help make you a better player – and who knows, may set you on the way to your own rock 'n' roll stardom…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

© Getty Images

GET YOURSELF A DECENT GUITAR
STEVE VAI
"You can get a great instrument cheap these days. You want to have something that will be able to stay in tune and have good intonation. The neck should be able to set the action as a low as possible without any buzzing, so it should have a decent and straight neck on it. Perhaps of greatest value is how the guitar makes you feel when you see it and hold it and put your fingers on it. It's a personal thing."

USE ACOUSTIC TECHNIQUES FOR MORE DYNAMIC ELECTRIC PLAYING
PATRICK SWEANY
"The dynamics and technique and attack… things that were so important to me on acoustic were still important on electric. You can add all these other things – where I'm picking, how I'm picking… the amped strength makes it all so much more impactful."

© Eleanor Jane

IT'S OKAY TO OVERPLAY… SOMETIMES
JOE BONAMASSA
"I used to get really up my own ass and think about being subtle. But what I've found is, the people who come to my shows don't want to see that. We've been doing this song *Just 'Cos You Can Don't Mean You Should*. I way overplay on this song live, but people love it. If people clap, I feel like I've done my job."

LEARNING STARTS WITH YOUR EARS
ERIC GALES
"It sounds obvious, but I truly believe that 98 per cent of picking up something is just listening to it. I can teach them the mechanics of something, but once they've got that, it's down to what they hear. Once they have the tools, it's up to them to pull it into their own revision of what they want to hear."

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT SPEED
JOEY SANTIAGO, PIXIES
"Mainstream guitar had a lot of typewriting skills. They were typing as fast as they can, and I couldn't hear it. The only thing that was impressive about it for me was the speed – how can they play so fast? I'm more like a classic-rock guy. You gotta hear some riffs or something you're going to remember, and that requires less notes."

"98 PER CENT OF PICKING UP SOMETHING IS THROUGH JUST LISTENING TO IT"

©2018_Mathieu Bitton

DON'T FORGET TO LEAVE SOME SPACE
ED O'BRIEN, RADIOHEAD
"I love space in music, I love not playing! When we did our first album, everything was taken up, but by *OK Computer*, there was a lot more space – things were breathing, and that's where I'm happiest. I love the aggressive thing, but not the whole time – you can punctuate and annunciate, it's like light and shade."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PLAY GUITAR LIKE IT'S A GUITAR
KURT VILE
"My dad got me a banjo when I was 14 and I used to play it like a guitar. It definitely informed my guitar playing subliminally. Because banjos are in an open tuning and they've got that high drone string. It's not like you'd even think about that when you're a kid, but I came to really like that ethereal drone."

“YOU HAVE TO BE DETERMINED TO LEARN THAT CERTAIN SOLO OR RIFF”

PLAY SOLOS FOR PEOPLE, NOT TO SHOW OFF
RITCHIE BLACKMORE

“I can’t really stomach too many guitar players who just play these non-stop, incessant runs. It gets crazy; it’s just exercises. There has to be a reason for soloing. If you try to play too technically, you lose something in the music – like you’re playing for another guitarist. I like to play for people.”

YOUR RIGHT HAND IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL
JD SIMO

“Spending time working on pick technique and hand strength is something you can exponentially improve, even in a month. You’ll see a hell of a change, because our muscle reflexes are quick. It’s those basic things that inherently make those players I look up to so special. Beauty in simplicity.”

GIVE YOUR GUITAR SOME ROUGH TREATMENT
JD MCPHERSON

“When I was in my 20s, I bought a Duo Jet and I took it back, because I was afraid to scratch it! My opinion is that if you get your hands on a guitar that sounds great and feels great, you should wear it out. Let it live a life. Even if it’s a vintage guitar, don’t put it in a closet somewhere.”

RECORD YOURSELF PLAYING
JOSH RAND, STONE SOUR

“Tape doesn’t lie. When you’re playing, you might not hear exactly how you’re phrasing it. If you record yourself and listen back, you notice if you’re sloppy in certain areas. It’ll give you a different perspective, you might totally change ideas after listening to it, rather than just playing it. With today’s technology, it’s so easy, it’s not like 30 years ago.”

DON’T GIVE UP
BEN WELLS, BLACK STONE CHERRY

“You have to push yourself when you feel like giving up. You have to be determined to learn that certain solo or riff. Set some goals for yourself. Give yourself something to work up to, and once you accomplish those little goals, it’ll make you feel proud of what you’re doing.”

TECHNIQUE ISN’T EVERYTHING
RIVERS CUOMO, WEEZER

“Most people don’t really care about guitar technique. They’re more interested in songwriting and singing. When I was working at Tower Records, they played music in there eight hours a day… and they weren’t playing Yngwie; they were playing Sonic Youth, the Pixies, and all these classic rock and pop records.”

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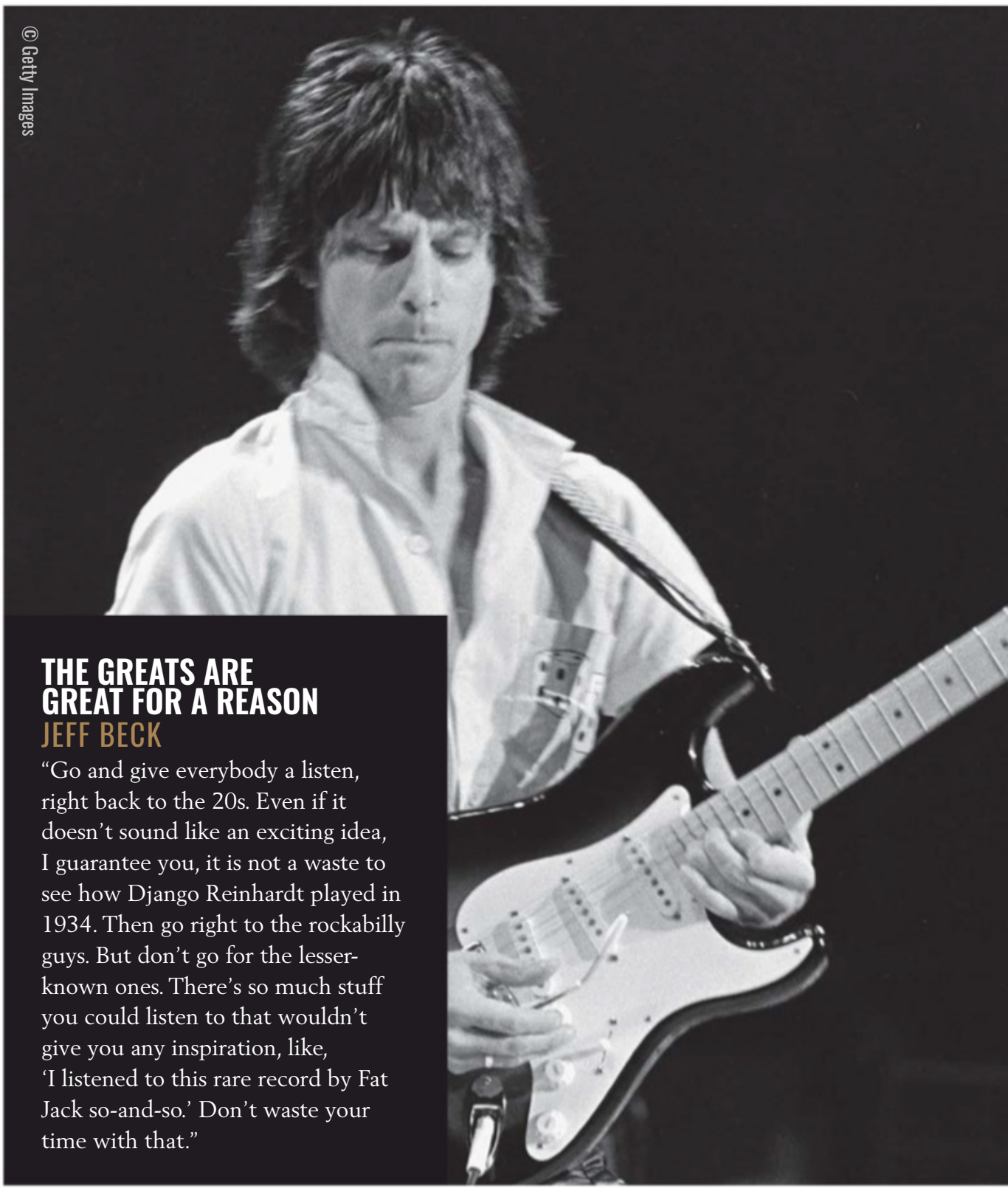

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THE GREATS ARE GREAT FOR A REASON
JEFF BECK

“Go and give everybody a listen, right back to the 20s. Even if it doesn’t sound like an exciting idea, I guarantee you, it is not a waste to see how Django Reinhardt played in 1934. Then go right to the rockabilly guys. But don’t go for the lesser-known ones. There’s so much stuff you could listen to that wouldn’t give you any inspiration, like, ‘I listened to this rare record by Fat Jack so-and-so.’ Don’t waste your time with that.”

EXPERIMENT WITH YOUR VOLUME KNOB
DAN PATLANSKY
"The longer you stick with one instrument, the better you'll know it and the better you'll play it. Also, if you solder a capacitor onto your volume knob you can get so many different sounds just by turning your volume knob up and down. Every notch of the volume knob has completely different textures. The lower my volume goes, the more jangly my sound becomes, because of the capacitor in there. There is a world of different textures in that cheap, simple mod. It's endless."

WORK ON YOUR VIBRATO
KERRY KING, SLAYER
"It's your own personal style, and how it evolves depends on how much you want to make it sing on its own. It has a lot to do with muscle development and getting calluses at the end of your fingers."

ADMIT NOTHING
WILKO JOHNSON
"If you play a bum note, keep a determined expression on your face and glare at the keyboard player!"

DON'T GIVE IT ALL AWAY UP FRONT
JOHN ETHERIDGE
"Stéphane Grappelli used to say to me when I played my best stuff in the first tune: 'Don't give it away – sell it.' Meaning, keep something back for later. Good advice."

MAKE YOUR SOUNDS COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER
JAMES MONTEITH, TESSERACT
"It's all about how the instruments interact together, it's basically trying to be one overall sound. There are no real virtuoso or 'this is me' moments: it's all about the whole thing working together."

DON'T WORRY ABOUT SWAPPING GUITARS LIVE
PAUL SAYER, ARCANE ROOTS
"I'd rather have the consistency of one instrument for a gig. I'd rather sacrifice the differences in sounds between guitars and manipulate what I've got than try and change guitars during the show. I like the challenge of less stuff."

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DON'T TRY TO SOUND LIKE ANYONE ELSE
DAVID GILMOUR
"My sound is what it is because of the way my hands and fingers are made, and due to my musical taste as well, I can't sound like anything else. I've never tried to make it like that; it's just the way I am. I've had my moments of wanting to sound like Hendrix, or Eric Clapton, or Jeff Beck. Eventually, I got to like the way I sounded, and things got better from that moment. Not just 'accepting' it, but really liking what I sounded like."

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ALWAYS SING YOUR SOLOS
JONATHAN WILSON
"You must be able to sing the solo, or there's an issue with the melodic component of it. I know so many guitarists that are great players and can mimic great melodies, but there is a disconnect between their hands and creating melodies. It's a gift. I think, and not everyone is connected to that."

LEARN HOW THE STUDIO WORKS
DIMEBAG DARRELL, PANTERA
"If you know how to turn knobs in the studio, then your guitar is going to come out like you want it to sound. Otherwise, you're at the mercy of whoever's running the damn thing, 'cause they can do whatever the fuck they want to it. It pays to be on top of your game, man, and know the ins and outs of all that shit and how it works."

GET OUT THERE AND GIG
MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT, OPETH
"Playing shows is more important than a band's Facebook page, ultimately, because you've got to be out there showing yourself in the flesh. Every fucking kid on the planet with rockstar dreams, the first thing they will do is start a Facebook page. It's more important to try to get shows. Be persistent, be a pain in the arse."

LISTEN TO OTHER GUITAR PLAYERS
OTIS RUSH
"You learn from listening to any guitar player. If you're interested in learning about music, you just pick up things from each other. And from that, you put it into your style.… We all play like one another, in a sense. If we all had to play our own music, there wouldn't be too many musicians!"

GET STRONGER
MARK TREMONTI, ALTER BRIDGE
"Rusty Cooley came up with his 'legato workout'. He used every single-finger combination of hammer-ons and pull-offs, all the way up the neck. It was all about building strength and dexterity. Then you slowly translate that into real playing. It was really vital to me for developing my legato skills. It's about repetition. Doing it over and over again."

TURN IT UP. WAY UP
JESSE WELLES
"If you want emotion, your amps have gotta scream and bleed. They have to sound fuzzy and hairy. They used to. Back in the day, the sound from a guitar amp was this big and nasty thing – that's how your solos became alive. I go right to my amp as a source. You should always go to the source. Your amp will speak to you if you give it a chance."

"IF YOU WANT EMOTION, YOUR AMPS HAVE GOTTA SCREAM AND BLEED"

THE RIGHT GUITAR CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING
PHOEBE BRIDGERS
"I love – love – open-tuned baritone guitar. It's perfect for how I write – it makes everything sound so sad! But it takes it out of the singer-songwriter world. Up until that point, I think because the way that my voice is and the chord shapes that I like, I'd been tuning a fuckin' acoustic guitar to C#! It was brutal!"

RHYTHM NEEDS PRECISION
JOHN PETRUCCI
"The cleaner and more precise it is, the more rhythmically accurate it is – that's when speed is at its most musical. So, for people practising that type of thing, I've always advocated working with some sort of solid reference, whether it be a metronome or drum machine, and working on subdivisions of beats. So when you play fast, you can lock it in to some sort of relevant subdivision within the music so that it doesn't just sound like nonsense. There's nothing worse than sloppy fast playing."

ALWAYS SERVE THE SONG
VINCE GILL, THE EAGLES
"The real purpose behind the guitar playing on a lot of those classic records was to serve the song. It wasn't just somebody out there blowing a bunch of riffs over some changes. All the guitar parts were beautifully thought out, very well composed and unbelievably memorable."

USE ALTERED TUNINGS TO GET YOURSELF OUT OF A RUT
JON GOMM
"Go into a new tuning you've never used before and try to write something immediately. Explore it a bit, but try to see what is possible just by moving your fingers around. It's a bit of a 'caveman' way of writing music, but it's very liberating and it's what a lot of the great songwriters from the past have done."

KEEP GUITARS IN DIFFERENT TUNINGS
DAVID CROSBY
"I play guitar every night and keep five guitars in different tunings in my bedroom, so I'll pick one up and start fooling around to see where it goes. If it takes me someplace I've never been before, I end up writing a song."

YOUR GUITAR SHOULD BE SPEAKING IN YOUR VOICE
HANK MARVIN
"When I'm playing a tune, I like to try to imagine I'm singing it and use phrasing that works for me. To feel I'm communicating something through the melody against playing it straight, or changing it so much that you lose some charm of the original."

NEVER STOP IMPROVING AND TRYING NEW THINGS
GEORGE BENSON

"Every day, I pick up the guitar and try to make a mental list of all the things I need to sharpen up on in terms of what's going on in the world today musically, without letting it take me too far off the deep end. I might be just looking to pick up a few things to add to what I already do. I may try to find a new device here or there, and then I'll woodshed on that and try to incorporate it into what I do. For a long time, I've been known for the way I play octaves and fast lines, but I had to work on those things for years before they were good enough to do in public. And if you discover one thing like that, it's invaluable… because people don't forget it."

GOING DIGITAL CAN KEEP THINGS MOVING CREATIVELY
RITZY BRYAN, THE JOY FORMIDABLE

"When you use loads of effects one after the other, it's easy to get lost in a 'gearhead maze'. It's not that you couldn't do that with an analogue setup, because you could, but it's whether you would get to that place as quickly and not lose some of the beauty of the momentum within that if you did."

LET YOUR SURROUNDINGS INFORM YOUR MUSIC
CHRIS STILLS

"While I was in France, I fell into a French way of approaching music which can be very different to the American way. When I went back to Los Angeles, I dove right back into my roots and the music that truly inspired me to want to do this in the first place."

STAY ON YOUR ROAD
PETE ANDERSON, DWIGHT YOAKAM

"Once I committed to being Pete Anderson, and was concentrating on me as a guitar player, I've been really conscious of staying on my 'road'. I'm just going to be the best Pete Anderson I can. I have certain techniques that are very unique to me, and I'm going to concentrate and expand on those. I'm going to expand on my tone, my right hand technique, my concept of harmony, and the way I play. And I'm going to blaze that trail as me."

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NEVER STOP LEARNING, ALWAYS TRY TO BE BETTER
ANDY SUMMERS

"You'll never master the guitar, and you'll never master anything. It's just too vast. But you keep going and you enjoy it. I've been playing all my life and I believe that I've had a very sincere and heartfelt approach to music. I've always really loved it. And I still believe I'm a humble student of the instrument and of music."

"I STILL BELIEVE I'M A HUMBLE STUDENT OF THE INSTRUMENT AND OF MUSIC"

CONTRAST IS THE KEY
MARTY FRIEDMAN

"When you're always at the same tempo and you're playing straight, fast and heavy the whole time, there's not a lot of contrast. Contrast just gives you a little break and surprises you with what comes next. So, those little surprises come in handy – especially when you do music without lyrics. You need other weapons to rely on."

IF YOU NEED TO PUT THE GUITAR DOWN, DO IT
GLENN TIPTON, JUDAS PRIEST

"I can get bored with the guitar if I'm not careful. I never want to get bored. So rather than play every day, I practise in bursts. And then when I want to rest, I put it down and go fishing. It makes me want to play the guitar, and when I want to play, I find I'm more productive, and come up with more ideas."

SONGWRITING KEEPS PLAYING INTERESTING
JEFFREY FOUCAULT

"That satisfaction you initially get from being able to play a chord without muting anything, there's a diminishing return. Then you learn other people's songs and that's really satisfying, but then there's a diminishing return on that… so you start writing your own songs."

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DON'T COPY TOO MUCH
MICHAEL SCHENKER

"If a guitarist copies for too long, they create a groove. And you can't break out of it. You're stuck with someone else's style. The fun part of being creative is having no limits, and to do what you believe. It's about self-expression. And the purer the self-expression, the more we can find unusual things hidden in the ocean of infinite creativity."

THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS
RICHARD LLOYD, TELEVISION

"It's about the man-hours. They did a study of classical symphony players, and found that first-chair violinists had put 2,500 man-hours more than the second-chair people. It made a vast difference when I learned that. Now, whenever I hear someone banging away at a guitar sounding like crap, I just think to myself, 'You've got 9,800 hours to get good'."

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IF YOUR PRACTICE IS EASY, IT'S NOT HELPING
JOE SATRIANI

"I've spent so many years learning so many fingerings, every time I go to do it, I just pick the version I didn't use the last time. But after a while, you realise that it bores you because you can do it. If you're doing it flawlessly, what's the point? You're not challenging your fingers. Usually, if you ask someone: 'Do you know how to play a harmonic minor scale?', they'll pick their favourite key and play it in two octaves. That's not what I'm talking about. I mean knowing like in the Biblical sense. And that's what the great musicians talk about: to know music is to know that thing inside and out, to know every nook and cranny of the scale, where it exists."

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT
GEORGE LYNCH

"Maybe forget some things, learn some new things, and change! I don't want to be the same guy every time I pick that thing up, and start to bore myself to death. But it's tough, because reinventing yourself, even in a minor way, is painful. Maybe you're not so good at this new thing, so you've got to try to get good at that."

AUTHENTICITY IS KEY
RICH ROBINSON, THE BLACK CROWES

"The best advice is to be sincere, don't fake it. No one can really write for anyone else, no one has your experience, genetics, upbringing, struggles and triumphs as a human on this planet. As long as you stay sincere, just write things that mean something to you."

DON'T FORGET ABOUT DYNAMICS
PAUL GILBERT

"You wouldn't believe how many guitar players do not use any dynamics. And it's not just a big section of loud and then a big section of soft. It's a constant up and down of different tones, volumes and space. And it makes a huge difference. Just that alone can separate the amateurs from the pros."

BUILD YOUR FOUNDATIONS
YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

"I think it's important to know theory and harmony, the scales, the relative keys, and learn how to improvise. These are hard things to learn. But there are different goals that people have. My question often is: 'Do you want to be good, or do you want to be famous?' If you want to be good, you might not get famous!"

GO SLOW AND STEADY
TOMMY EMMANUEL

"If you've never done something before, then you have to go slow and work out an exercise that will get you moving in a smooth way. So you teach yourself how to do exercises that will help you turn the skills into music. I want to play music! Don't get caught up thinking, 'I've got to be in the gymnasium of the guitar world to get any good.'"

"DYNAMICS ALONE CAN SEPARATE THE AMATEURS FROM THE PROS"

KEEP IT SIMPLE
CHARLIE STARR, BLACKBERRY SMOKE

"You can clutter a song up with too many ideas. I try to be a good editor of myself. You'll say: 'We don't need this change here, or this part', or the opposite: 'We need another turnaround here' or, 'We need something to happen, it feels as if it's a little empty'. Those things usually work themselves out."

GET THE RIGHT STRINGS
ARIEL POSEN, THE BROS LANDRETH

"Throw some heavier-gauge strings on your guitar. Lots of people use tunings such as DADGAD, open D, open C, and so on. When you tune down so low, the strings get loose and don't handle tunings as well. If you're primarily in standard tuning or open E, you shouldn't have to go higher than 0.011s."

IT'S MORE THAN THEORY
GUTHRIE GOVAN

"If you sit down with a scale book, you'll end up knowing all these shapes, but it's just a cold morsel of theory. The musical player isn't there anymore. If you can't sing or feel it, then you don't really own that scale. You just memorised the shortcut. The process has to be imagining music, then being able to play what you hear in your head."

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THE GUITAR INTERVIEW

PETRUCCI

As the lynchpin of ambitious and prolific prog-metal pioneers Dream Theater, John Petrucci has seen his band steadily rise to the vanguard of the modern rock scene. Now, on the verge of 14th album *Distance Over Time*, the restless, spectacularly talented guitarist sees his band celebrate its 30th anniversary with two Grammy Award nominations and millions of album sales to its name.

We sat down with Petrucci to discuss his new approach to songwriting, going back to his blues and classic-rock roots and why he doesn't feel the need to experiment with gear any more…

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

© Getty Images

"WHEN WE GET TOGETHER AND WE PLAY AND THE AMPS ARE CRANKED UP IN A ROOM, WE JUST LOCK INTO THESE REALLY STRONG, AGGRESSIVE GROOVES. IT'S A LOT OF FUN"

ABOVE Petrucci performs on the G3 tour in Austin, Texas in 2018

For a band that's been together for over three decades with an album catalogue in double figures, it must surely be difficult to remain innovative and fresh while continuing to be a genre-defining force. But for the undisputed kings of progressive metal, the studio sessions for new record *Distance Over Time* necessitated a new direction. The band locked themselves away at a secluded facility in New York to create and write an album that reflected and captured how they think they sound best – jamming in a room together, with their amplifiers cranked up.

Happily, they succeeded. Recent forays into huge orchestral arrangements and reverb-laden electronica have been eschewed in favour of a more stripped-down approach, often referencing the classic-rock touchstones of Deep Purple and Free, and showcasing a rawness and authenticity – perhaps even vulnerability – hitherto unheard on a Dream Theater album. Of course, the performances from all five musicians are still technically astounding (this is Dream Theater, after all), but as far as songwriting goes, the new album is possibly more representative of Dream Theater 'the band', thanks to the collaborative approach to writing that shutting yourself away from to the rest of the world affords…

You locked yourselves away to write and record this album. How did that change your approach?
"In some ways, it really didn't change the type of interaction that we normally have when we write together. I guess what it did change was that the overall atmosphere was way more relaxed: we weren't really on a time schedule and we were able to have a bit more free time to talk about the music, hang out, eat and bond. The settings just kind of made that interaction and that chemistry, that's already really good, a little more relaxed and flowing."

Did you all have all songs written before, or was the majority of the material written in the studio?
"The majority of it is written in the studio together. I felt it was really important this time to have everybody's involvement and have it be a

very collective experience. But we also don't go in empty handed: we have a whole bunch of ideas from soundcheck that happened while we were on tour, and then I have ideas, guitar riffs and chord progressions, melodies and things that I've collected."

Did you have an idea of what type of album you wanted to create from the outset?

"Before we went in – we had talked about it a lot, actually – we really wanted this album to be more of the 'primal' Dream Theater. When we get together and we play and the amps are cranked up in a room, we just lock into these really strong, aggressive grooves. It's a lot of fun; the type of thing that puts smiles on our faces.

"We wanted to make sure on this record that we kind of showcase that and feature that heavier, groovier side. We also talked about having a lot of playing, a lot of freedom as far as solos and trades, instrumental parts and things just to kind of infuse that part of our sound I think is really important.

"We talked about as well the length of the album, keeping it a bit shorter, keeping it around an hour, keeping the songs more concise – so that you could potentially, in one sitting, in a car ride or something like that – listen to the whole album."

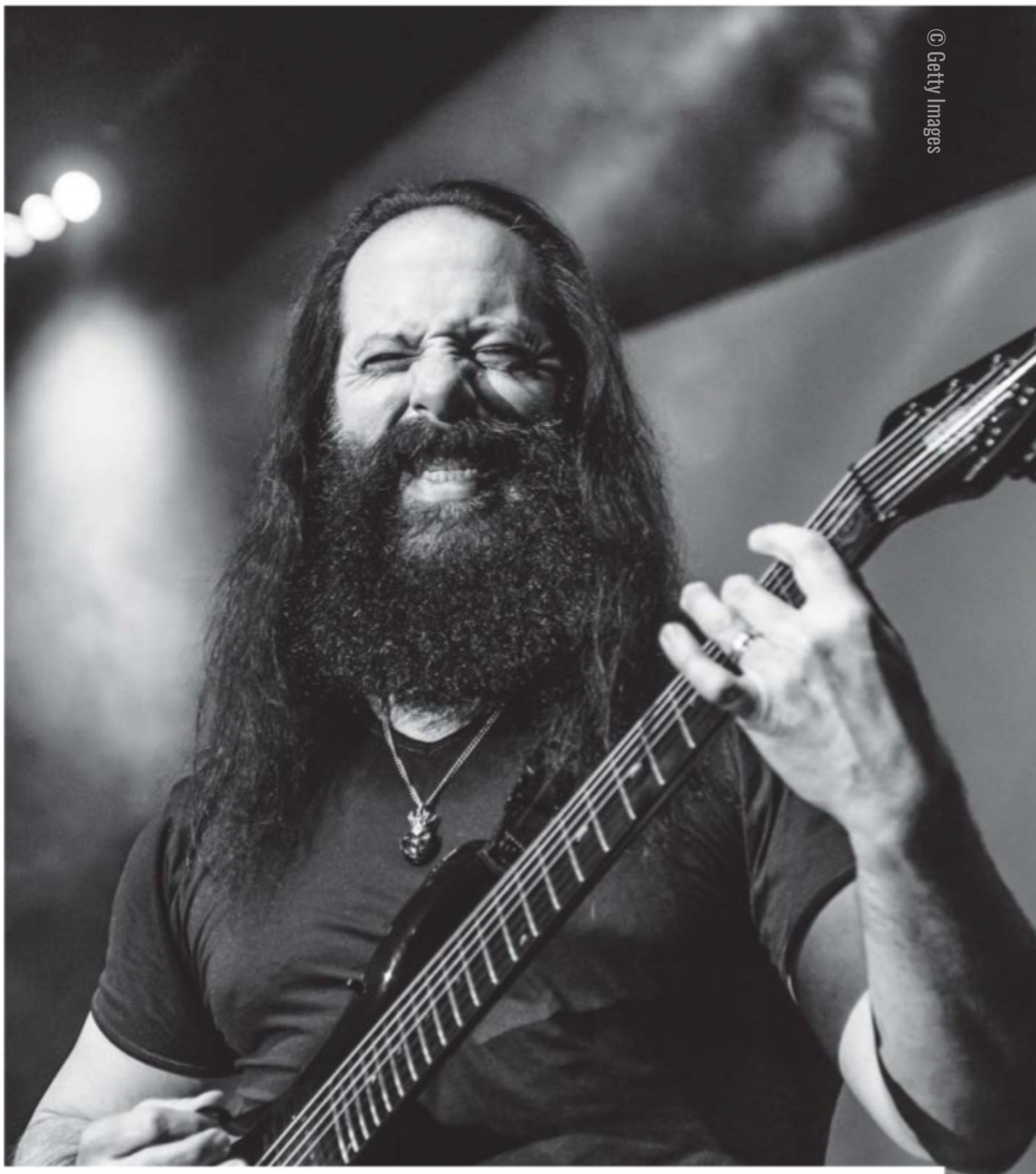
How do you approach writing instrumental interludes? Like for example, the one that features in *Pale Blue Dot*?

"First of all, going into it, we knew that we wanted it to be kind of wacky and crazy and very angular. So that means when we're putting ideas together it's not like normal songwriting; they don't necessarily have to be coming from the same headspace: they could be completely different feels, time signatures, tempos. We're going into it saying 'anything goes', and we wanted it to be really like a pinball in a pinball machine, just bouncing from one section to the next, so that as a listener you can't really anticipate what's going to happen.

"The larger challenge is you have all these different sections that are in different time signatures, keys, feels – how do you make them connect in such a way that it works? A lot of that's done with resolution, as far as key changes and voice leading is concerned – we use a lot of voice-leading techniques. Some of those connections are made through melodies where the melody is the glue, and some of the things where

HIS MAJESTY

This year's NAMM Show saw the release of the 2019 edition of Petrucci's signature Music Man model, the Majesty. Six brand-new finishes were unveiled for this neck-through design. The Majesty is pictured in its Enchanted Forest finish and features a centre 'shield' of flamed maple in a lightweight African mahogany body. Red Sunrise, Blue Honu and Dark Roast also come in this configuration, while Kinetic Blue and Stealth Black feature a basswood body and no maple shield. The most notable new appointment is the pair of brand-new signature DiMarzio Dreamcatcher and Rainmaker pickups, which feature a push volume for over 20dB gain boost. There's also an ultra-premium Tiger Eye Majesty model featuring an enlarged carved flame top over alder with matching flame-maple headstock.



we're connecting from one section to the next are done rhythmically."

What was your approach to solos on this album? Were they improvised?
"Some of the themes for the solos sort of happened while writing the album. So, for example, the whole outro section of *At Wit's End* fades out with the guitar doing a melody part. That melody I came up with while we were writing the song; it's on the demos. So I wanted to make sure that I retained that melody, because it really worked, musically.

"The solo in *Out Of Reach*, which is a baritone guitar, a lot of that I recorded just on the floor in front of my amp. It's very, very close to the live improvised demo version I did, because I thought it had a really cool feel to it. The other ones are more complicated, I guess; more involved.

"It's a combination of improvising and going for some sort of feel, but also having an idea: like for this section, I really want to do this crazy, crazy run, but I'm not sure what the notes should actually be, so then I'll work out what the notes should be and work it in. It's a combination of composing, a bit of improvising and a bit of drawing from what I did when we first wrote the song."

When you listen back to a lead take that you've recorded, are you happy to prioritise feel over technical perfection?
"Yeah, definitely. It's something that took me a while to be able to let go of. Sometimes, it's just something that happens that was magical the first time and it's like, yeah, you might be able to play it a little bit better, but you captured something. It's like lightning in a bottle, and you don't want to get rid of that flavour trying to get the perfect version."

For this album, you said that you wanted to go back to your roots in metal and prog. But listening to it, we detect quite a lot of classic-rock flavours; are those bands and those genres influences?
"Absolutely. Some of those more bluesey, sort of Zeppelin-y things were coming out – and some Deep Purple and Metallica. Things like that, once you start to kind of do blues-based riffs, it's going to evoke that kind of mood. Also, the other thing is that Jordan is purposely using a lot less electronic sounds and a lot more organ, and distorted organ.

"I really wanted this album to sound like the guys playing. Everybody is a very strong musician when it comes to playing the song together. Forget any bells and whistles and things like that: what does this sound like when we're all jamming and rocking out? It's actually a very powerful and groovy sound."

"SOMETIMES, YOU'VE CAPTURED SOMETHING. IT'S LIKE LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE. YOU DON'T WANT TO GET RID OF THAT FLAVOUR TRYING TO GET THE PERFECT VERSION"

Did you use your Mesa/Boogie JP-2C signature amp throughout the album, or did you experiment with any other amps?
"I have no need to experiment any more, my signature Boogie is like my dream amp. It's exactly what I need; it does everything that I'm looking for perfectly."

Did you experiment with any other guitars in the studio, or did you just use your Music Man signature models throughout?
"Again, no reason or desire to reach for anything else. I've been with Music Man for 18 years now and my signature line, to me, are the best guitars on the planet. I had a whole bunch of Majestys with me in the studio, with various different tunings, so the record

"I'LL HEAR A PLAYER LIKE JOE SATRIANI PLAY, DRAWING FROM ALL THESE DIFFERENT INFLUENCES, AND I'M LIKE: 'HEY, WAIT A MINUTE, HOW DO YOU DO THAT?'"

is all Majesty – except for two songs, where I used my signature baritone version."

What do you think your strengths and weaknesses are as a guitar player?
"I think my strengths are I'm able to make the guitar do what I'm imagining I want it to do. Since I was young, I've always worked on my technique to get it to the point where if there was something I've heard in my head, then I was able to do it. As far as weaknesses, there are so many aspects of guitar playing, so many different styles that I'm very much not connected to, not good at, don't have experience with. Some of the greatest players, like Joe [Satriani], or like a Guthrie Govan, have the ability to bust out everything from Travis picking to gypsy jazz, bluegrass, blow through the giant step changes and things. Even though I went to Berklee and all that, it's just like those types of things are all difficult to master in themselves. If anything, I'll hear a player like Joe play and start drawing from all these different influences, and I'm kinda like scratching my head, like: 'Hey, wait a minute, how do you do that?'"

Did you benefit as a guitarist and musician by having to learn and transcribe in the way you did, rather than having the information at your fingertips, as it is these days?
"I'm not really sure. Now, kids can see it and watch it on YouTube and slow it down and see exactly how it's being done: we didn't have that, I didn't have that. I had to, like, drop a needle on a record if I wanted to learn an Al Di Meola lick. Even Jimmy Page licks, I had no idea how they were doing it, and you'd try to imagine how they were doing it and that took longer. So maybe there's some benefit from that kind of struggle and hard work, figuring it out on your own."

Do you still practise and study these days?
"Absolutely. Recently, I actually went to a small luthier in Germany who's got a gypsy-jazz acoustic that I've started getting into. I was really blown away by the unbelievable technique and improvisational skills of those guys and I was listening to that and I was like: 'I want to be able to do that.' Yeah, that happens all the time, for sure."

You've got a unique approach in that in a lot of your solos, you tend to pick every note, which gives an aggressive feel to the line; what is it about picking every note that appeals to you musically?
"When I first got into that by listening to Steve Morse and Al Di Meola, I was really, really addicted to that whole concept, and was like: 'I'm going to pick every note and that's the only way to be,' because it creates a very loud, forward, powerful and articulate sound when you're playing. It's the articulation and the separation of the notes – if you do it right, there's nothing like that. There's also this challenge and this pride, and kind of bragging rights that you can play in such a way that's harder. It's like you're taking the more difficult path, so you're able to have this pride.

"As the years have gone by and I've done more and more playing, recording and touring, I tend to use picking every note as a variation in my technique. So I've kind of come to the point where I do way more of a combination of a whole bunch of different techniques, instead of just using one." G

Dream Theater's new album, *Distance Over Time*, is out now on Inside Out

THIRTEEN

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Lowden GUITARS

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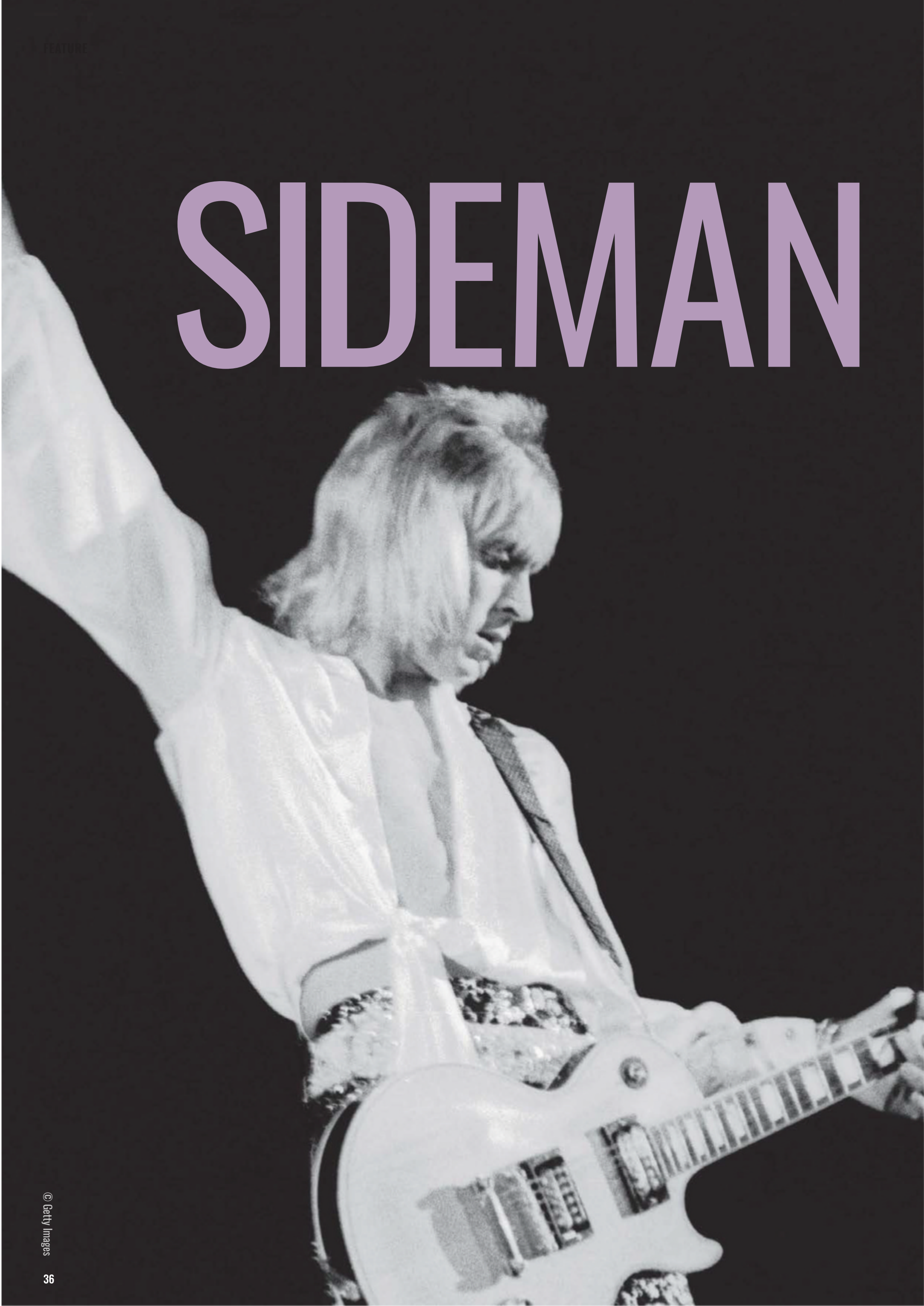

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TO THE STARMAN

Mick Ronson's work with David Bowie in the early 1970s changed the world of popular music forever, and the guitarist's telepathic understanding with the Starman became the bedrock on which such iconic albums as *Ziggy Stardust*… and *Aladdin Sane* were laid. Legendary producer Ken Scott was in the room when Mick and David were establishing their remarkable creative mojo – here, he reflects on the contribution of a uniquely talented but often underrated guitar genius…

WORDS RICHARD PURDEN

Mick Ronson's considerable contribution to David Bowie's canon as a guitarist, arranger and producer is something that's been given a fresh examination in recent years, and has only intensified since Bowie's sad passing in January 2016. Indeed, Bowie himself went on record in 2013 to extoll the platinum-haired guitarist's contribution to his seminal work between 1970 and '73, the audio of which would be used in the 2017 documentary *Beside Bowie*, which also included *Station To Station* player Earl Slick describing Ronno as "the best guitarist David Bowie ever had".

Another key figure in Bowie's creative team in the early 1970s was producer and engineer Ken Scott, who had first come aboard for the 1969 *David Bowie* album (re-released in 1972 as *Space Oddity*) as an engineer, and was present when the Ronson was plucked from his role as a gardener for Hull City Council to join Bowie's band, not long before he began recording 1970 album *The Man Who Sold The World*. With Tony Visconti producing, and Ronson's former bandmate Woody Woodmansey on drums, Scott came later into the process and was able to see the evolution of Bowie's studio relationship with the young Les Paul-toting Yorkshireman.

"I did some mixing and overdubbing on *The Man Who Sold The World*," Scott recalls. "And while David wrote and sang the songs, everything else seemed to be Tony… and obviously Mick had more to do with it. David had a fair amount of success, then he worked with Tony who was very controlling in the studio and had no success. I think at that point, David felt he had to put his money where his mouth was. If he was going to fail, it would be on his ideas."

GLAM REVELATION

The Man Who Sold The World's disappointingly modest sales caused Bowie to take a break while he focused on writing songs, leading to Ronson and Woodmansey heading back to Hull, not knowing if or when they'd be asked back. But Bowie's relationship with Ronson was special – they had a chemistry and understanding that surpassed his relationship with all but a handful of his many collaborators over the years.

After almost a year, Ronson and Woody got the call to come back to London, and with the addition of bassist Trevor Bolder, would form Bowie's band (later

THIS SPREAD Ronson wielding his iconic stripped 1968 Les Paul Custom

“EVEN WHEN RONNO TRIED TO PLAY NASTY, THERE WAS STILL A PURITY… MICK WAS ONE OF THE NICEST GUYS AND THAT CAME THROUGH IN THE PLAYING, BECAUSE IT WAS HIM”

ABOVE Producer and engineer Ken Scott worked with Bowie and Ronson during their all-too-brief collaborative union at the turn of the 70s

dubbed The Spiders From Mars) for a revolutionary new project – *Hunky Dory*. With Scott brought on board to co-produce, they headed into London’s Trident Studios in June 1971 and emerged two months later with an album that would become one of Bowie’s most critically acclaimed and influential works. “It was a perfect team for what David wanted to put across at the time,” Scott recalls. “That whole thing of David and Ronno, then Trevor, Woody and myself – we never had to talk about it too much, it was all there.

“I thought David was a good singer and a nice guy. My feeling was, it’ll be a decent album, but no one will ever hear it – I never saw him being a superstar at that point. Then I heard the songs and it was like, ‘Oh fuck; he’s going to be huge,’ and it terrified me. There was a lot going on when we first started to record, because David and I had never produced before. There was a lot of trepidation, but as we were trying things and they began to work, I slowly but surely gained confidence and it was probably the same with the other guys as well.”

Key to this was Ronson’s ability to wear the hats of guitarist, producer and arranger. As someone who had previously worked as an engineer on The Beatles’ extraordinary studio run, it didn’t take long for Scott to pick out that Bowie wasn’t the only exceptional talent in the room. “I think the sum of all the parts was greater than the individual thing,” he affirms. “David or I would start talking about what was required and Mick would immediately say: ‘I know,’ and nail it instantly. Mick was up there with all of them; The Beatles would spend a lot of time getting everything right. Mick got everything right, but he did it lot quicker. He had to, because they had budget and time constraints.”

TOP GEAR

When it came to gear, Ronson’s famous stripped 1968 Les Paul Custom was unsurprisingly the fulcrum of his tone on tracks such as *Life On Mars?*. “When it came to his sound, it was always the Gibson Les Paul through a Marshall and the Cry Baby wah,” Scott explains. “Through the Cry Baby is generally how we got his sound, he hardly ever touched the amp. Mick would start at one end of the wah and slowly work down or come up, he’d hit the sound we wanted, leave it there.”

With recording quickly completed, Bowie warned Scott: “I don’t think you are going to like the next one; it’s a lot more rock ’n’ roll”. While the producer admittedly hadn’t heard The Stooges or The Velvet Underground at that point, he was raised on Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent, and took to it like a duck to water. “It was perfect for me; I loved rock ’n’ roll,” Ken enthuses. “We recorded *Ziggy Stardust*… very quickly after *Hunky Dory*: when people talk about the difference between the two records, I say listen to *Queen Bitch* – it could have fitted perfectly, it was a continuation from there, really.”

Ronson’s intuitive riffs could hit as hard as a knockout punch, while retaining a characteristically clean delivery. *Aladdin Sane* is Ronno at his most effective, the likes of *Panic In Detroit* and *Cracked Actor* are under his charge, with the energy palpably rising out of the grooves. The work remains as striking as it did in 1973. “Even when Ronno tried to play nasty, there was still a purity to his playing,” explains Scott. “Mick was one of the nicest guys and that came through in the playing, because it was him. With *Cracked Actor*, we were after the nastiest sound we could get from the guitar and harmonica. David started to play it straight acoustically and it sounded so weak compared to everything else, so we fed it though Mick’s Marshall and cranked it. We wanted it as nasty as we could get it. That was a tough one for Woody – we were after that Bo Diddley thing, we wanted it to swing. With English drummers, it’s very

meat-and-potatoes. When I saw David play the song with American musicians live much later, it had more swing, it had a certain feel."

Various tales from the period have Bowie humming ideas for solos that Ronson would transform into iconic solos on the likes of *Time* and *Moonage Daydream*, but Scott is quick to pour cold water on these notions. "I don't recall David ever humming anything, it might have been that David was humming in Mick's head!" he exclaims. "Mick would always come up with what we expected. We had expectations of what he would give us and he came through every time, normally on the first or second take. It's that horrible thing of, yes Mick's solo's are amazing… but they were expected, so they didn't seem as amazing to us at the time."

LONG-HAIRED CONDUCTOR

As well as the perfect guitar player for Bowie's early 70s transformation into a cosmic pop icon, Ronson's remarkable gift for arrangement further lifted songs such as *Life On Mars?* above the typical singer-songwriter fare. "The orchestra didn't like longhairs conducting them," Scott chuckles. "He would arrive 10 minutes before the orchestra was due at Trident and would run up stairs to the first-floor toilet and later come back down with a huge grin on his face. One of my favourite memories of Mick was when the phone rang randomly the one and only time we were halfway through a take of *Life On Mars?*. Ronno was really pissed off and we couldn't use that, obviously, so we recorded it again. We'd forgotten all about it until we got the master and started overdubbing strings. On the sustained bit at the end as it fades out, we suddenly heard piano and the phone ringing, we knew we had to keep it in, but we also had Ronno shouting: 'Oh, fucking bastard!' It's very funny when you hear it on the multitrack.

"But he was an incredible arranger. Mick tried things that other people wouldn't. Another great example is *Walk On The Wild Side* from [Lou Reed's] *Transformer*; it was amazing what Mick wrote for that and whatever he did just worked."

MARS MISSION

In summer, 1973, Bowie dramatically announced the end of The Spiders From Mars live on stage – much to the surprise of the Spiders themselves. This also signalled the end of the Bowie/Ronson creative partnership. Aside from the covers album *Pin Ups*, they would not work together in the studio together again for 20 years. Significantly, the duo would pick up the thread from where they left off recording a version of Cream's *I Feel Free*. Ziggy and the Spiders had performed a version of the track at Kingston Polytechnic in May 1972, and Bowie had considered a studio version for *Pin Ups* as Jack Bruce had originally been slated to play bass on the album. The version recorded for *Black Tie White Noise* would be released just weeks before Ronson's death from liver cancer aged just 46 in April 1993. "David would not have been as big as he was without Ronno," Scott reflects. "I don't think David gave him enough credit. Ronno had served his purpose. The last thing I did in the studio with David was *1984/Dodo*, which was two songs put together as a composite for *Diamond Dogs*. When we were mixing it, he kept referencing Barry White. At that point after *Pin Ups*, he was looking for that American sound. Ronno would not have fitted in with that."

While some harsh words were exchanged between Bowie and Ronson in the aftermath of the Spiders split, both softened as time went on, and perhaps it was Bowie who summed up their wonderful creative partnership best. "As a rock duo, I thought we were every bit as good as Mick and Keith, or Axl and Slash," the great man insisted. "Ziggy and Mick were the personification of that rock 'n' roll dualism."

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BELOW Bowie and Ronson at London's Marquee Club in 1973, during filming of US TV special *The 1980 Floor Show*

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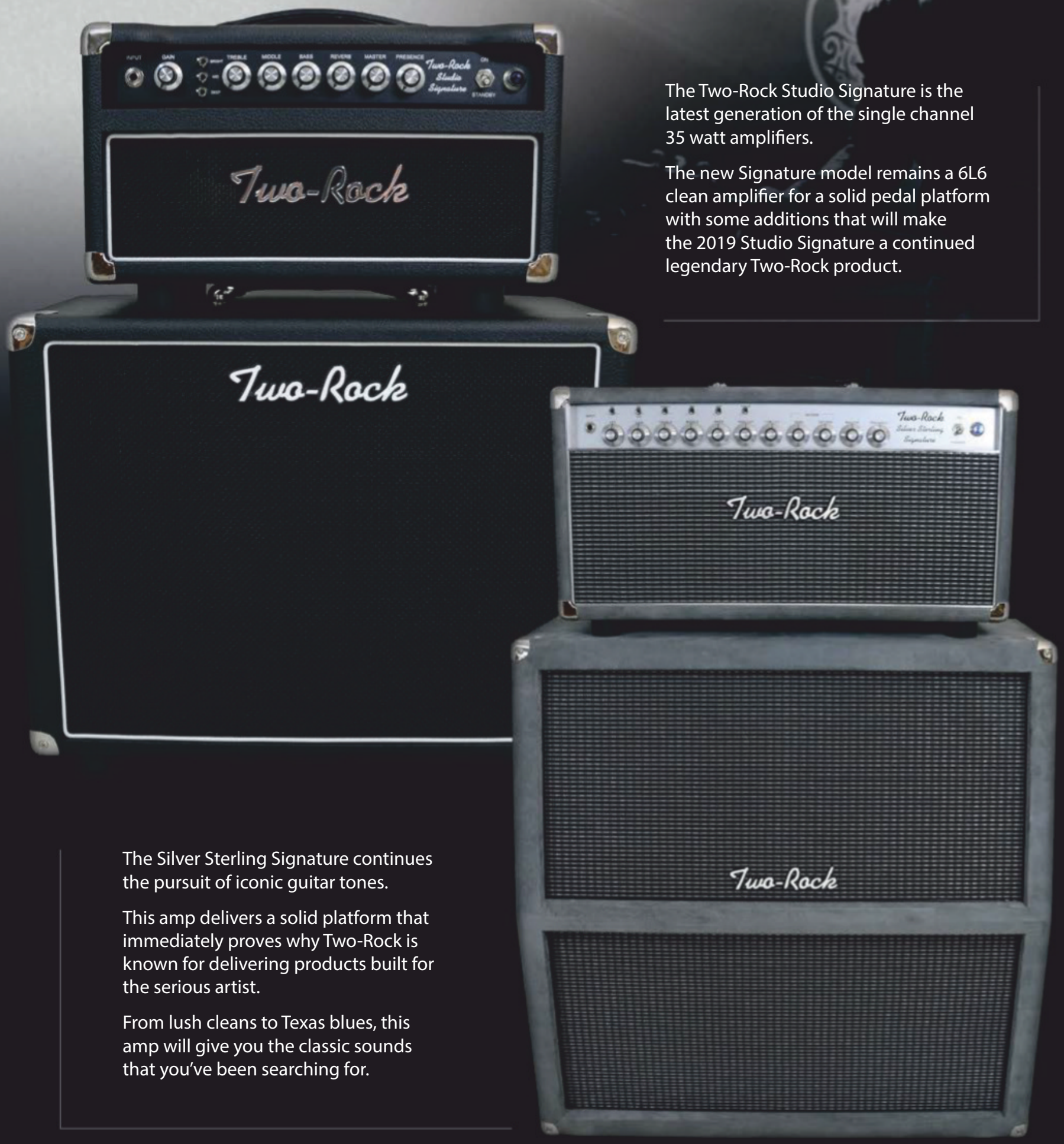

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JIM DUNLOP
1936-2019

Jim Dunlop Sr, one of the most influential figures in the guitar gear world and founder of the Jim Dunlop company, has died. He was 82. Glasgow-born Dunlop founded the company that bore his name in California in 1965, having relocated from Canada at the start of the decade. Dunlop is perhaps most famous for its ubiquitous guitar picks, but the company has also been responsible for producing a huge array of influential and successful musical products, from capos to effects pedals – most notably, the modern Cry Baby wah pedal.

After moving to San Francisco with his pregnant wife Bernice in the early 1960s, keen guitar player Dunlop took a job as a machinist while pitching a guitar-related invention, the Vibra-Tuner, to music stores at the weekends. Then, one day, serendipity struck. "At that point, I was losing money. One day, I was in San Francisco trying to sell it to a guy and he told me there was a need for a good 12-string capo, and I decided I was going to make one," Jim recounted to the Jim Dunlop website. "So I came up with the design and patented the overstretched knee, or Toggle capo. I started making them on my own, with my wife. That's the capo that became the 1100, as we call it now."

Dunlop's development of these capos coincided with the folk boom of the 1960s, and he soon moved into making slides, but Dunlop's real big break would come when a frequent customer, Berkeley luthier Jon Lundberg, suggested Jim start reproducing the old National thumbpick.

PICK ARTIST

It would be the start of a venture that resulted in the Jim Dunlop company. His thumbpicks were a huge hit, and soon, he'd begin making nylon flatpicks, which would be even more successful. Before long, Dunlop was a leader and innovator in the guitar-pick world, creating a variety of hugely popular and often-imitated plectrums based on information about pro guitar players' preferences that he read in guitar magazines.

Perhaps the most famous Dunlop pick design is the Jazz III, but equally influential was his company's development of the Tortex material which, by the 90s, had become the most popular type of plectrum on the planet.

PEDAL POWER

But Dunlop's story wasn't just about plectrums and capos. Since the 1980s, the Dunlop name has become equally synonymous with effects, most notably the Cry Baby. Dunlop purchased the Cry Baby name after the product had been discontinued in the early 80s, but it wasn't gone for long.

"The pedals had been off the market for six months," Dunlop said. "Dealers were unable to get them in their stores. We wanted to bring them back." Rather than just recreate the same beloved but somewhat unreliable pedal, Dunlop turned his engineer's brain to rectifying the flaws and common complaints of the original design to create a pedal that would be up to the rigours of modern guitar players.

"It changed the whole direction of the company," said Dunlop's son, Jimmy. "It was very uncharacteristic of the products that we were working with at the time. You've got this guy who was a machinist, who made accessories like slides and picks and capos, and he just jumped right into the number-one-selling electronics product of all time – the number-one pedal of all time. There was no caution, no hesitation, and the word 'failure' was not in his vocabulary. He just said: 'I don't know what it's all about yet, but I'm going to figure it out.'"

The reborn Cry Baby was a stratospheric success, being played by everyone from Stevie Ray Vaughan and Slash to countless amateur players. By the early 2000s, Dunlop was able to boast that the Cry Baby was the best-selling effects pedal in the world.

This winning formula of business opportunism mixed with good engineering practice would go on to become a feature of Dunlop's expansion and growth, most notably with its purchase of the defunct MXR brand later in the decade.

MXR's pedals – particularly the iconic Phase 90 – were much loved by 1980s guitar fans, but the rack boom had seen the company's stompboxes decline in general popularity. Dunlop saw potential, reviving the brand and building on the company's heritage with new designs that appealed to guitarists of the era, such as the Super Comp and Q-Zone auto-wah.

In recent years, Dunlop continued its commitment to effects making by bringing boutique effects pioneer Jeorge Tripps into the company, while also adding his pioneering Way Huge brand to the Dunlop family of products.

One way or another, there can't be many guitar players on the planet who haven't used a product Jim Dunlop created, and for that, he'll be fondly remembered as one of the most important and influential figures in the history of the guitar industry.

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NAMM CONVERSATIONS

The NAMM show is about more than just new product launches. It's also where you cross paths with some of the industry's leading movers and shakers. Gibson, John Mayer, Lowden and Ed Sheeran generated some of the biggest headlines at the show – here's what they had to say…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER & CHRIS VINNICOMBE

ED SHEERAN & GEORGE LOWDEN

The pop superstar and the venerable guitar builder give us the story behind NAMM's most talked about release…

Despite the company's enviable reputation, ahead of NAMM 2019, few would have expected Northern Irish acoustic maker Lowden to be responsible for the biggest story of the show. Then on the Wednesday evening, Lowden gathered a small group of journalists and retailers, brought out the biggest pop star on the planet… and broke the internet.

Sheeran By Lowden, as the new affordable acoustic range is called, set tongues wagging in Anaheim and beyond – but what did the key figures involved have to say about it? Let's ask Ed and George…

"They're quite weird instruments, because whenever I pick one up, they have songs in them already," Ed said at the launch event. "I'll just instantly start writing a song with it. I think there's something magical about them as instruments. I've never found a better recording guitar, but I was always quite apprehensive to gig with them because I beat the shit out of my guitars on stage. Now, it's the best stage guitar I've played. I've never really found a guitar that does everything. I wanted them to sound as good onstage as they are when used for recording.

"So I said to George: 'Is there a way that you can still make these quality guitars, but make them slightly more affordable?' It's definitely not a starter guitar. It's at the same price point as the first guitar that I bought. George has spent a long time making the design right, and making sure we can make it an affordable price. It's pretty exciting."

For Lowden himself, the push from Ed fulfilled a nagging ambition. "About 12 years ago, I said would love to be able to make an affordable guitar, but in our look," Lowden recalled. "And that's been ruminating at the back of my mind until Ed gave me a little prod and said: 'Let's see if that can be done.' And so the challenge was to make the guitar that he wanted, that he would be proud of.

"You're not just trying to make a guitar less expensive, you're trying to make a guitar that will make you feel really good. It has to sound alive. So, these are the challenges that we've been grasping with for the last couple of years. I hope we've arrived."

In order to tick the price and quality boxes while making the guitars in Northern Ireland required one of the world's most respected luthiers to re-examine decades of learning.

"I've spent 40-something years trying to make the ultimate guitar," Lowden explained. "So that when a guitar player picks it up and starts to play, it really responds very fast. To then have to change my thinking, to keep what I've learned, but to incorporate that in a guitar that was affordable – this was quite a challenge.

"I employed a couple of aerospace engineers to help me find ways to make this guitar efficiently and quickly, but also precisely. There's the thing about aerospace engineers: if they make one mistake when designing a plane, people die! They're very precise about the way they approach things, to the point where it drives me insane! So I just had to learn to be patient. But we've got there. We built a completely new facility in Ireland to build these guitars."

If the production techniques employed were cutting edge, George was keen to ensure that the materials used were true to what a Lowden guitar has always been.

"I wanted the woods to be exceptional," Lowden insisted. "All of the woods are reclaimed, sustainable sources, which is very important to me. The wood was on the same level as what I've always done. I haven't compromised on that at all."

"The guitars that I used to play on stage were made with wood on the front but had high-pressure laminate on the back… and I just didn't know you could make guitars at this price point with really great woods," Ed added. "I was like, 'Are you sure!?' But then playing them as well – and I'm sure George won't mind me saying this – but it's like playing a Lowden. It's amazing that George has got it to the point where it's almost exactly like playing one of the real good ones. It's just a really great instrument. It's beautifully made and it's made in Ireland, which was a really cool feat as well."

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JC CURLEIGH

The new CEO of Gibson tells us about his vision for the company as it celebrates an important milestone and looks to the future…

After skipping the show last year, Gibson returned to NAMM in 2019 in a big way, with a huge booth showing off brand-new guitars designed with a renewed focus on the company's peerless heritage and classic designs. Affable new CEO James 'JC' Curleigh was on hand to chat to us about the hugely positive response to the new instruments on show, and lay out his long-term vision for the future of the Gibson company…

How's the new job going?
"Well, so far, so good – this morning was amazing, we celebrated our 125th anniversary milestone, and I've been here about 125 days! But it's great. There's an amazing energy in the booth here, but most important is that we put all the emphasis on our guitar – our classics and our contemporary. It's just amazing, but what's cool is that pride in Gibson, and you can feel it from our team here on the booth – and also last night, our artists got to show off the new products, so it's amazing to see it all coming together."

The mood around Gibson seems notably more positive of late…
"We've been synonymous with shaping and creating and owning this cherished sound for 125 years, and so you say like, 'Man, that's our obligation for the *next* 125 years!' And so our vision is pretty simple – we want to be the most relevant, the most played and most loved guitar brand, and I think we are. The team feel it, the artists feel it, our specialty dealers feel it, so now we're in a position to take it to the next level, and I think it's real."

The new ranges revealed at NAMM feel noticeably streamlined and more focused than things have been in recent years…
"There's a well-know friend in the merger world called 'edit to amplify', less is more. Just think of some of the best guitarists, they live by less is more – it's the notes you don't play that matter as much as the ones you do.

"Also, from a philosophical side, I was president of Levi's – it's an amazing and iconic American brand, but you really need to think of the next-generation dynamic, and to do that you have to balance heritage with modernity. And the best way that I can think of doing that is to have an approach that's like 'the 125-year-old startup'. Leverage your heritage and your earned iconic status, but make the future really matter, and think like a startup – it's agile, it's focused. It really pays attention to what's going on, and then has the agility to deliver it. So the 125-year-old startup at Gibson is alive and well!"

© Getty Images

JOHN MAYER

The guitar star was at NAMM to reveal some new finishes options on his PRS Silver Sky model, but that didn't stop him giving his thoughts on the 'internet hell' surrounding the signature guitar's launch last year – and how he sees it as a model for the industry as a whole…

"For the record, I never thought it was 'internet hell'. I'm of the generation that understands. Saying you don't like or not, it's not complaining, it's like touching a thing you can't touch. So I always knew that it was exciting to people. Paul and I, you know, I think we really nailed the guitar aspect. What I was interested in, and still am, is transcending the slightly dated music-instrument world. Everyone who deals in music instruments is also involved in buying other things: cameras, watches… we're all consumers of other things.

"What I've been trying to do is really dovetail the way a guitar should feel and the way it should be presented, like the way everything else should be presented.

"That's why I've enlisted a product photographer for the guitar instead of this sort of passport photo. And I know that it's working, because it's my own damn guitar and when I look at the pictures, I go, 'Oh, okay'. Do you create something that you look back on, and go like, 'Oh, I wonder how long that goes back for me?" And that's some sort of success.

"So I feel like it's happening, people are both accepting it as an instrument that has a place in the market, and they're also accepting it as something to be lusted over in a different way than 'it's just a piece of gear'.

"I like telling a slightly deeper story behind stuff. I think that greatness is communicated in every little thing you do, like the white balance of the pickguard. I feel like in the last three or four years, retail photos have become more important than brand photos, because that's what people end up seeing. And there's so much creativity in the direction of retail pages right now and that's so impressive.

"[Retailers] make lookbooks and things that challenge other brands' marketing departments, and that's really fun to see, too. So your one was about accepting whether or not this thing should even exist.

"And that's done, cause people are now going off and choosing their favourite colour. And I really enjoy surfing people's attention span – it's a wave and you can ride it. And I was prepared to beat them anyway, because I just have a longer attention span for liking something that they have for not liking something. And that's where we are, the work's been done. Two years of designing the guitar with Paul, one year of pushing through people's perception. And that's the thing, there's a balance. If everyone loves it off the bat, maybe people didn't do enough to evolve something. So we're through that.

"Now, if you write about a Strat with a PRS headstock, you get made fun of by almost everyone else in the comments section. Which means I did a really good job of creating something that would outlast people's attention span in that regard.

"It's about the future. Anything that you imagine we should do with a guitar we will eventually do with the guitar. And the fun part is telling the story. It's fun when people say: 'I don't play guitar, but I want one.' That's exciting to me. So I think that's where we are. The groundwork has been laid and now's the time to sort of extend the narrative of the story. I want to collaborate with different brands to make it happen.

"I think the guitar should move forward with the rest of the product world and get away from the 1960s in terms of the aesthetics. I think we're well beyond that. And that's the fun part, taking things into the same world of the stuff we buy and look at and lust over.

"I actually want to take it into the world that excites people about sneakers. It's something about, 'Oh, he's dropping a limited-edition colourway.' But I'm not taking advantage of anybody, 'cause I do that myself. I can be manipulated and I enjoy being manipulated. If you do it correctly, it's really fun."

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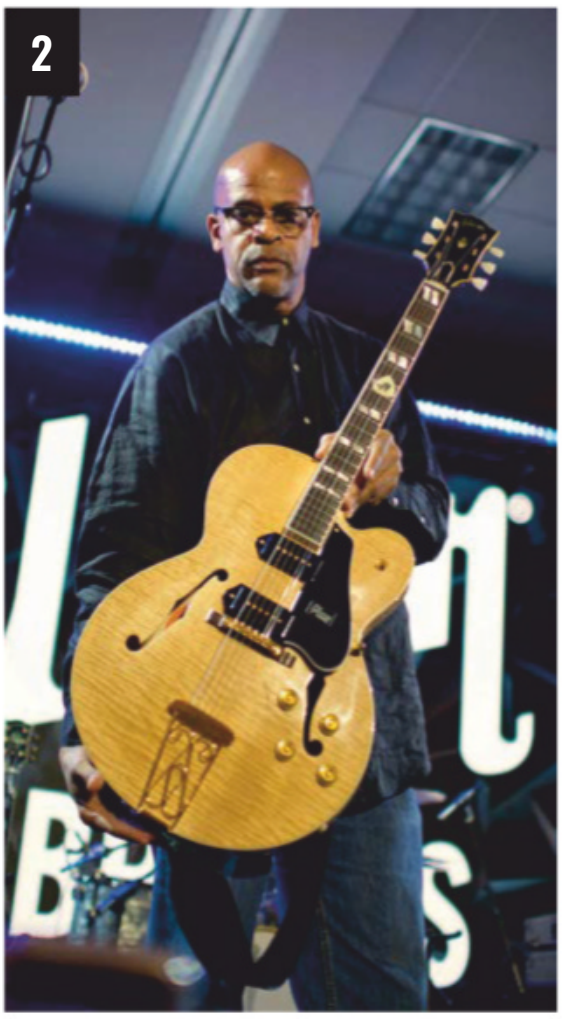
NAMM 2019 wasn't all rockstars and CEOs, of course – here's the coolest and most noteworthy gear we found on the show floor…



1 This limited edition Fender Custom Shop Double Esquire Relic, resplendent in Silver Sparkle over roasted pine, certainly turned heads

2 Gibson Custom revealed the new Chuck Berry Tribute ES-350T model with the help of the rock 'n' roll icon's son, Charles Berry Jr

3 Ibanez's 40th Anniversary TS808 Tube Screamer comes in an eyecatching Ruby Red sparkle finish

4 The Deep Oggin chorus/vibrato pedal was the big NAMM launch from acclaimed UK builder, ThorpyFX

5 The Beetronics Swarm offers wild fuzz-harmoniser fun

6 Walrus Audio's Lillian phaser has plenty of versatility inside

7 Eastman's new Double Top acoustics promise extra clarity, projection and sustain

8 Blackstar's new JJN-20RH MkII model is a signature amp for towering rocker Jared James Nichols

9 Marshall's Studio range delivers Plexi and JCM800-style tones in 20-watt head and combo formats

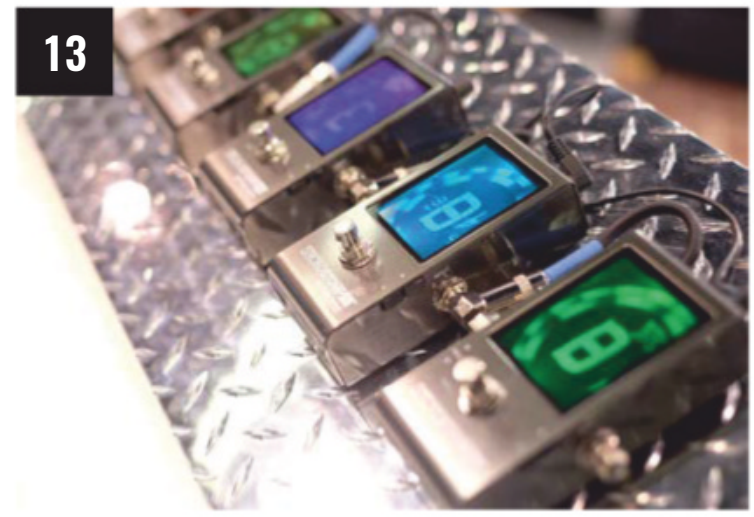
10 Ross effects made a comeback on the Reverb.com stand

11 Relic pedals go mainstream, with Danelectro's new Eisenhower Fuzz

12 Gretsch fans on a budget will find much to love in the company's updated Electromatic and Streamliner ranges

13 Peterson's new StroboStomp HD adds a variable-colour LED backlit display for more visible tuning

14 Gibson shifted its focus back to its heritage for 2019. This heavy-aged '59 replica with a one-piece top was the Gibson Custom standout



THE MONEY SHOT
1961 FENDER PRO-AMP

Kicking out 40 watts through its 15-inch Jensen, this Fender Pro is a fine example of the company's 'Brownface' era of 1960-63. Often seen as transitional models that bridge the gap between the mid-rich overdriven raunch of the 50s tweeds and the scooped tonality of big-bottle Blackface amps, the early 60s Pro has plenty in common with the 5F6-A Bassman circuit, but features woozy harmonic tremolo as an onboard effect.

From the growing amplifier collection of ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, UK, this old Pro is a real looker, and the eagle-eyed among you may remember that it featured on the cover of the October 2018 issue of this very magazine. In near-original condition inside and out, even the original footswitch is present and correct.

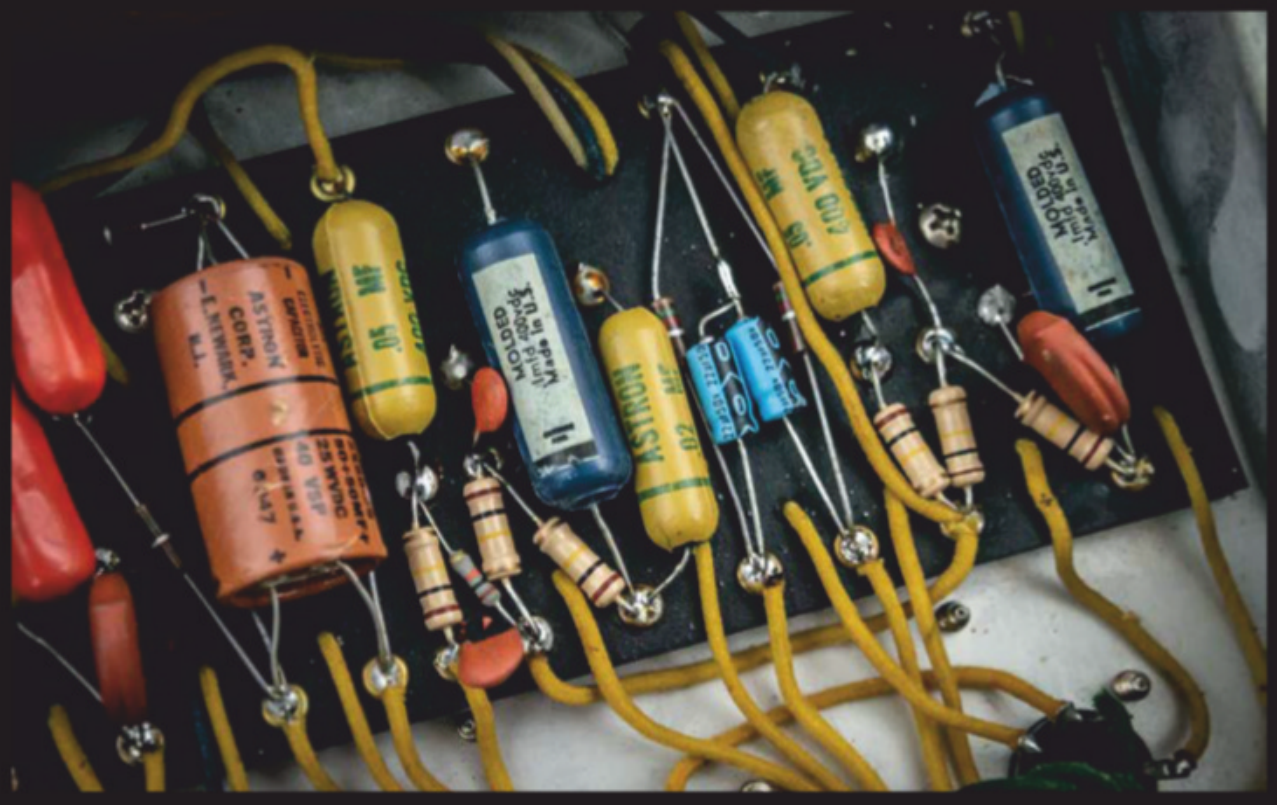
Only in the Fender catalogue in this incarnation for a brief period, by late 1963, the Pro was dressed in black and its harmonic 'vibrato' was switched out for an optical circuit. Then in 1965 came spring reverb and a pair of 12-inch drivers and by the following year, the plain ol' Pro was a thing of the past. Head to atbguitars.com to find out more.

PRESENCE
Pro
Amp
FENDER ELECT. INST. CO.
DESIGN

Jensen
LOUDSPEAKER
SPECIAL
DESIGN

NORMAL
VOLUME
TREBLE
BASS

Fender



HGCI
PUSH
BUTTON
FOR

CALIFORNIA SOUL

From humble beginnings in a Haight apartment in 2006, Milkman Sound's Tim Marcus has handcrafted a range of superb-sounding boutique amps – using his pedal-steel background to inform their design…

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID AXELBANK

ABOVE Milkman Sound is situated in Toland Place, South San Francisco, having started life in the city's Haight area in 2006

FACING PAGE A selection of the high-quality components used in Milkman Sound products, including custom Mercury Magnetics output transformers

South San Francisco is an area of the famed tourist-rich city that's rarely touched upon by travel guides. That's partly because it's home to the city's industrial manufacturing base, and partly due to the area's rundown appearance. Nestling amongst warehouses and commercial buildings are all manner of businesses and suppliers, as well as a sizable homeless population living in broken-down mobile homes and makeshift encampments. However, like many industrial urban settings, South San Francisco is also historically the home to artists, musicians, recording studios and all kinds of creative companies. Most are drawn by the ample warehouse-style accommodation, as well as the affordability of one of the city's most inaccessible neighbourhoods.

One such company is Milkman Sound. Proprietor Tim Marcus established his current base in the South San Francisco area in 2016. Since 2006, he'd worked to manufacture his extensive range of boutique amplifiers from his apartment in the Lower Haight. The new space, while tight, is a well-organised and tidy headquarters, which reflects the exacting nature of the construction of Marcus's amplifiers.

It's impressive to consider Marcus is a one-man operation; each Milkman amplifier is hand-wired and constructed painstakingly to ensure the highest-quality product, using high-grade components such as Jupiter capacitors and Mercury Magnetics transformers. Amps can be covered in a range of custom-colour Tolex, and in addition to providing a wide range of products, many are born out of a desire to provide something more unique to the player.

HAVE AMP, WILL TRAVEL

Marcus is also an accomplished musician. Performing with Bay Area players – particularly on the pedal-steel – inspired his early amplifier designs. When looking for an ideal platform for the instrument, Marcus initially set out to design amplifiers with high headroom to accommodate the high power output of pedal-steel pickups. Since then, the product range has expanded to include everything from low-power amplifiers such as the One Watt Plus, to the whopping 700W Bass Half And Half. In total, Marcus manufactures 12 distinct amplifier models, with convenient steps in power rating (5, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 85, 300 and the aforementioned 700-watt bass head).

Introduced in early 2018, The Amp is the newest addition to the Milkman range – it's effectively a 50-watt guitar amp based in a box that measures an impressively diminutive 21 x 7 x 16cm (w x h x d) and weighs in at just 1.1kg (2.5lb). Marcus's inspiration for The Amp came from a desire to build a lower-power version of his 300-watt Half And Half amp in an extremely portable unit. The Amp is powered by a single 12AX7 tube, which is easily accessed by removing the side panel for changing or swapping out different tubes, and a Class D power amp. Tone control takes the form of a three-knob EQ.

Also included are outputs for pedal out, Speakon (speaker out), XLR with cabinet simulation and a speaker-emulating headphone output for silent use. Finally, The Amp runs on variable AC (100 to 260) for use anywhere in the world. One of the most distinctive features of The Amp is the Robert Keeley-designed digital reverb, which can be switched via an internal DIP switch between spring or plate, as well a trim pot to alter the decay rate of the reverb. In addition, there's an analogue tremolo circuit. The LFO (low-frequency oscillation) of the tremolo can also be altered via an internal DIP switch.

It's easy to see how these cumulative features have made the unit Marcus's most successful creation to date. By offering such a well-considered range of selling points, The Amp provides players of all levels an entry into compact pedalboard-mounted amplification, or alternatively a high-quality sonic platform for home or studio production.

We caught up with Marcus to find out more about his tone philosophy and working methods…

Before we dive into the details of Milkman Sound, could you tell us more about your music-making?
"I play in a number of bands in the Bay Area, but I spend the most time playing with Kelly McFarling And The Home Team. We've been playing music together for about six years now."

How would you describe the type of music you play?
"Kelly's music is hard to define, but it definitely falls under the umbrella of Americana. When I first joined

her band, the sound was more folk, but we've evolved a lot since then. I tend to gravitate towards bands and music that pushes the limits of genre – pedal-steel is a great instrument for country music, but it really shines when you take it into different contexts."

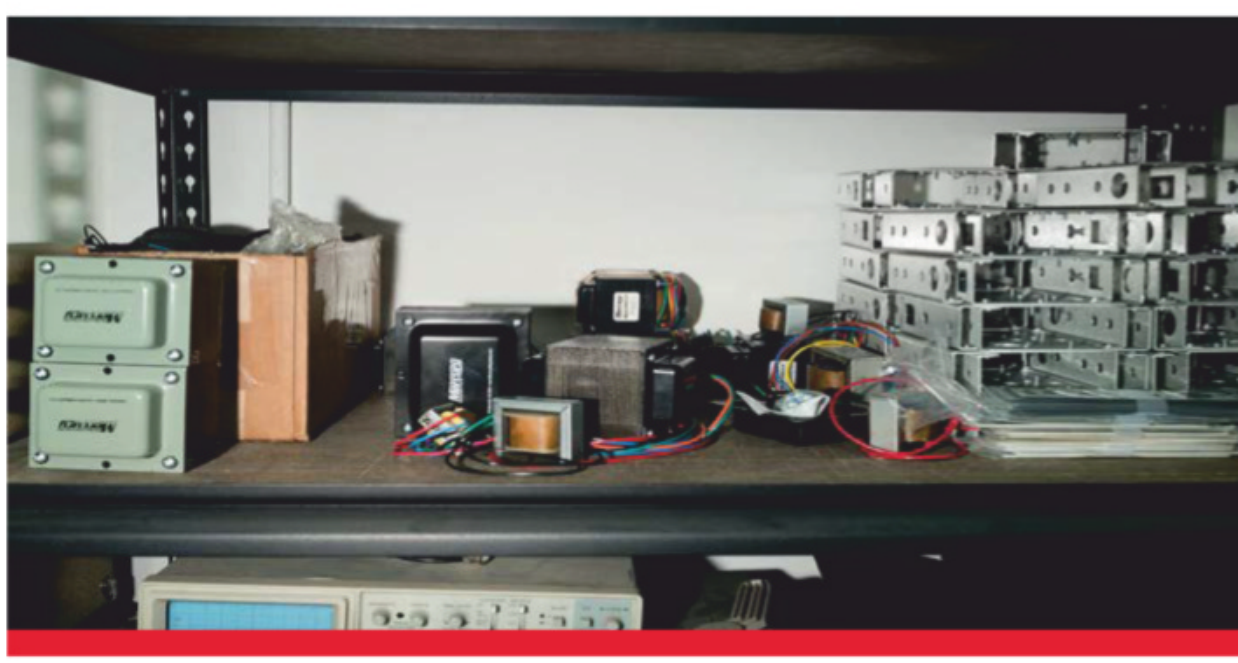
How long have you played pedal-steel?
"I started playing it in 2005, when I was living in New York City. It's hard to believe that I've been playing for 13 years! The steel guitar is an instrument where time is an essential investment. It's very hard to pick up pedal-steel and be a natural. It takes years of work to get the nuance and intonation of the instrument to work in your favour."

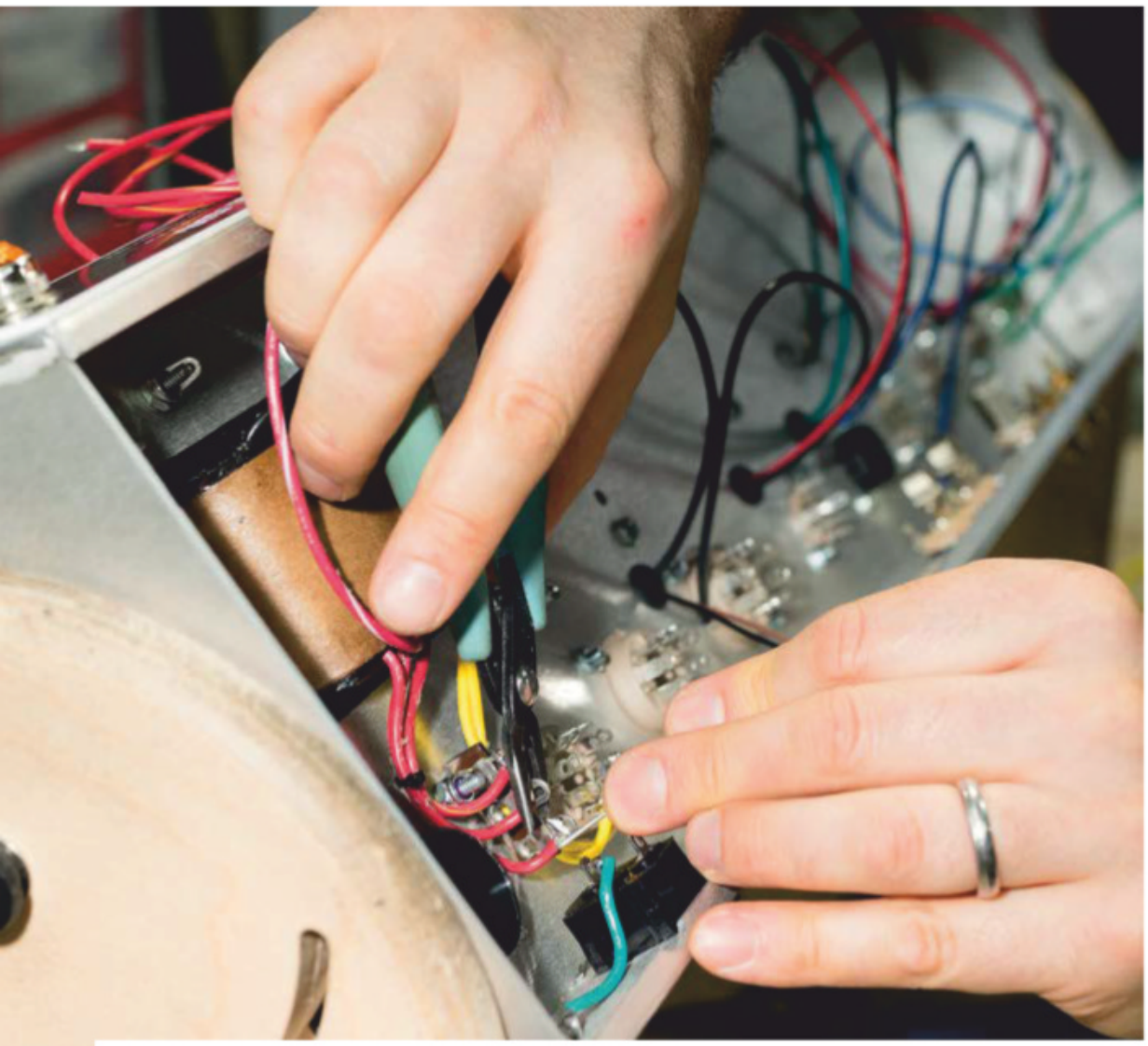
How important a consideration is the pedal-steel when designing your amps?
"The first amplifier I designed was specifically intended for pedal-steel guitar, but I've broadened my horizons a bit since then. I usually test every amplifier with my pedal-steel to make sure the bandwidth and overall headroom is there, but not all of my amps are pedal-steel-friendly anymore. That said, the steel guitar is pretty handy for amplifier design, because it has an enormous bandwidth and has a very hot pickup, which demands a lot of headroom. Dynamic range and headroom are very important to guitar players as well, so if a design sounds great with pedal-steel, I know it's going to be a unique and wonderful experience for six-string guitar players."

What was the amp you were working on while we were shooting?
"I was working on a pair of 50-watt Sideman amplifiers. This was originally designed as a two-channel amp for steel-guitar players who did double duty on guitar or another electric instrument, but eventually evolved into a single-channel guitar amplifier. It sits in a unique power range in my model line-up – 50 watts has the big transformer sound, but also functions well at low volume."

You mentioned the quality of the components you use; how important are these to the overall sound of the amps you produce?
"I like to equate building amplifiers to making pastry. It's all about technique and the quality of ingredients used. If you get them both right and do not make any sacrifices, you will get the best version of your creation that you can get. I have custom aluminium chassis made for me and I like to use solid pine for the cabinets. Those two elements can take a design to another level, because of how they respond to electron flow, grounding, and vibration."

How long have you been in your present location?
"I moved my shop in to its current location about three years ago. I started in a really small room there





“I LIKE TO LOSE MYSELF IN THE WORK. IT’S A ZEN THING, LIKE PLAYING MUSIC OR DRIVING LONG DISTANCE. WHEN I’M BUILDING, I’M ABLE TO TAP INTO THE FLOW STATE”

ABOVE All Milkman Sound amps are hand-wired by Tim Marcus

FACING PAGE BOTTOM LEFT Milkman’s amps are available in a range of custom Tolex finishes and even relic’d tweed

FACING PAGE BOTTOM RIGHT The five-watt Milkman Half Pint head

that was being used as a supply closet. Then I got a medium-sized room that I outgrew in about eight months! Now I’m in the largest room that they have, but it’s still a bit tight. Before my current shop I was working out of my apartment, which was a lovely experience, but did present some challenges when it came to making noise.”

Are there any significant challenges to being located where you are in San Francisco – the industrial nature of the area and social issues?
“Honestly, I love being in San Francisco and I do not look at the current social situation in the city as a handicap to having a small business. There are groups like SFMade and others that are there looking out and lobbying for the little guy. The city has changed a lot since I have been there, but San Francisco is always in a state of change. If I’m there long enough, I’ll probably see it change into something else – hopefully something better, where there are less people suffering from the technology boom.

“There can be some frustrations when it comes to finding a space to manufacture, or finding employees that can handle the ebb and flow of small-scale manufacturing – but I don’t think that’s unique to San Francisco. I think that is happening all over the United States. It’s always been hard for the little guy to stay in business in this country; there’s no support structure.”

Could you tell us more about the studio?
“I currently rent a shop space in Light Rail Studios, which is a fully functioning analogue recording studio. They have a massive amount of equipment down in the control room, including a Trident – a range console with loads of history, including use on a few Queen records and Bowie records. There are also piles of gear used by the Dead: a tape machine, a few organs, and some other odds and ends. It’s nice to be surrounded by so much history. They have a lot of old and funky amplifiers in the live room, too, and I often leave my prototypes down there for them to use on records.”

How did you hook up with Robert Keeley for the design of the reverb and tremolo in The Amp? Do you envision any other collaboration with him in the future, or indeed other pedal manufacturers?
“Robert Keeley and I were initially put in touch by Josh Scott from JHS pedals. He talked Robert into using a Creamer in his NAMM booth, and Robert was immediately smitten with the overall Milkman vibe. I ended up building him one of my 40-watt Mini 12-inch combos, which he keeps at his house. When it came time to develop The Amp, Robert kind of forced my hand a little, in a good way. He would not allow me to use a digital reverb program that was not up to his personal standard. About a week before the NAMM show in 2018, he overnighted a package with his reverb program and I have to admit, he made The Amp what it is today. His reverb program sounds amazing and it responds like a real reverb tank. It’s very impressive. I’m sure we’ll work together more in the future – he and his team are extremely talented.”

You say prefer to work alone – can you expand on why that’s preferable for you?
“I like to work alone, because I find that I’m much more productive that way. I am not antisocial or anything like that. It’s actually kind of the opposite: when there is someone working near me, I become Mr Chatterbox and nothing gets done. I also like to lose myself in the work. It’s a zen thing, just like when I’m playing music or driving long distance. When I’m building amplifiers I’m able to tap into the flow state and melt away into a different consciousness. That’s the state of creativity and it’s where ideas find their way into my path. It’s a nice place to be.”

Have you thought about relocating your business out of San Francisco, given the cost of living?
“I have thought about it, but it really pains me to think that the next stage of my life will take place elsewhere. I truly love San Francisco. The overall vibe here suits me and the weather is perfect, too. I live in California, but I can’t deal with heat. Where else am I

IRON WORKS
1.800.7
restaurant

Milkman

“I THINK THE FIRST TAYLOR AD WAS JUST A TREE, OR SOMETHING. I REALLY RESPECTED THE IDEA THAT THE PRODUCT AND CRAFTSMANSHIP WOULD SPEAK FOR ITSELF”

THIS PAGE Though very much a one-man band, Tim Marcus rents his shop space in Light Rail Studios, a multi-purpose recording and rehearsal space

going to live that’s 65° all year long, for the most part? The creative soul and culture of San Francisco is still lurking beneath all this tech stuff. There’s an amazing music and food scene and pretty much everywhere you want to go is walking distance. It’s a magical never-never land and I don’t want to grow up!”

How have you seen San Francisco change?
“The biggest change since I’ve been here is the increase of tech workers living in the city. Where I grew up in Connecticut, everyone lived in a suburb and worked in the city. Here, it’s the complete opposite – but it only recently became that way. When I first moved here, I lived in one part of the city and worked in another, and it was a piece of cake to get between the two. Now the traffic on both the city streets and freeways is totally choked out from commuters leaving the city for work out in the suburbs. It’s extremely inefficient and the infrastructure of the city has not been upgraded to handle it. Getting materials around the city has become a chore and also getting customers to come to my shop during my regular hours has become nearly impossible. If I have a customer coming from the East Bay, forget it, man – there is no good time of the day to have them come by.”

You seem determined to eschew celebrity endorsements; can you explain why?
“Shortly after I first started Milkman Sound, I participated in an event with Bob Taylor from Taylor Guitars. He mentioned they never did endorsements or had artists featured in their ads. I think their first ad back in the day was just a tree, or something like that. I really respected the idea that the product and craftsmanship would speak for itself. There are many artists and ‘people of note’ using Milkman amplifiers, but I am a fan of discretion. When someone famous orders from me, I do not share it on social media or anything like that. My Instagram feed is probably 99.9 per cent musician-free – it’s just the amplifiers, the materials I use and the occasional picture of me futzing around on pedal-steel. It’s amazing how far this approach has taken Milkman. When I first committed to it, I thought it would be a huge mistake, but it has turned out to be really great. Thanks Bob! Great advice.”

Is there anything you can reveal in terms of new products that you’re developing?
“I cannot reveal too much about Milkman projects, but I can say that I am really going to be digging into The Amp as its own product line in 2019. We have a few variations and spin-off products planned for NAMM. There are some secret hand-wired amp projects in the works as well, but they won’t surface until later in the year.”

Find out more about Milkman Sound at milkmansound.com

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AZURE METALLIC

SOUND OF HONOR

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SHOP TALK

CURTIS NOVAK

PICKUP MAKER

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

If a background troubleshooting IT issues for the US Government seems an unlikely foundation for a career winding pickups, it certainly helped Curtis Novak learn to sort the essentials from the snake oil...

Guitar forums are awash with talk of alnico V versus alnico II this, plain-enamel versus formvar-coated that, and what resistance reading your Strat pickup or PAF needs to be to achieve 'authentic vintage tone'. Ask New Mexico-based maker Curtis Novak to build you a pickup to your trendy specs checklist, though, and you're likely to hear a 'click' at the other end of the line as he turns back to more important matters. Novak has learned over his 20-odd years of making pickups professionally (backed by a good 15 years of winding them on the side before that) that the only way to guarantee customer satisfaction is to play it by ear.

The results have yielded highly acclaimed pickups to fit just about any guitar or playing demand. Novak and his five-person crew are particularly known for a long-time specialisation in a range of Jazzmaster pickups, while having introduced some of the earlier Gold Foil-style replacements available anywhere, and from Strat, to Tele, to PAF-style humbucker, to stealth Melody Maker replacements and beyond, he's got a coil to suit virtually every need.

SPECS, SCHMECKS

"In the early days, I was kind of like a short-order cook," Novak tells us. "I'd stand there with all the stuff and people would tell me what they want, and I'd whip it up. And I learned over time that the people who were really, really picky about it could never be pleased. I would do all this stuff and some guy would get really upset. 'They say you're the best, and this doesn't sound at all like I expected it.' And I would say: 'Well, what were you expecting it to sound like?' They'd tell me what they wanted to *hear*, and I'd say: 'God, if you'd have told me that I never would have wound what you asked for!'

"So I switched, probably about 15 years ago," he adds, "and I don't talk specs. I *won't* talk specs. I want to hear what you want it to sound like. The way I break it to a musician is: 'If I catch you playing in a bar or a venue, I may request you to play a song, but I'm not going to tell you what key to play it in, because you're the professional. Or if I'm going to go to a dentist, I'm not going to tell them how to fix my

ABOVE Curtis Novak, 'chief mad scientist' of Curtis Novak Classic Pickups, Inc, has been involved in creating guitar pickups and restoring vintage instruments since 1983

FACING PAGE A glimpse inside Curtis Novak's workshop in his native New Mexico – for more insights, follow him on Instagram: @curtis_novak_pickups

“THERE ARE THINGS I’VE NOTICED THAT VINTAGE PICKUPS HAVE THAT WEREN’T THERE LATER. I’VE INSTITUTED A LOT OF THOSE [INTO] THE SOUND OF THE PICKUPS I MAKE”

ABOVE Novak built his coil-winding machines himself: “It’s like the one that Leo designed and built for Fender and we wind our pickups the way he did... by hand”

FACING PAGE This fine specimen comes complete with a set of vintage dog-ears and emits a satisfying growl

tooth.’ When people tell me they *have* to deal with specs, I say: ‘No, there’s plenty of other people you can go to with a punch list.’ I offer a full refund, and very rarely do I ever get pickups back.”

STRIPPED FINISHES AND BUSTED COILS

Novak was born in 1965 and grew up in New Mexico, where his early ogling of the instruments in the Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogues segued into hands-on messing with guitars and electronics. The youngest child in a large family, his siblings had all been provided school-band instruments and the like by Novak’s parents… until he came along. Following wreckage and carnage and the expense of years of hire-for-purchase woodwinds and battered percussion, they weren’t falling for that one again, so young Curtis had to fend for himself once the bug bit.

“In junior high,” Novak recalls, “a couple of my friends were playing instruments and so forth, and one of them got a new guitar for Christmas and was selling his old one, so I bought it off him with my lunch money for the year. I enjoyed playing a lot more back in those days, but what I realised was I’ve always been more intrigued by how things worked and the mechanics of it, and what made things sound differently. I quickly ended up buying a few more guitars when I was a kid, just because that one would be apart and I wouldn’t have one to play, so I was always finding these interesting instruments: ‘What’s different with this one? Why does it sound different from that one?’ and all that.”

The first craft inspired by Novak’s early guitar deconstruction, though, was refinishing – and he earned a reputation in that arena that equals his current standing as a maker of world-class replacement pickups. The practice of scavenging for old stripped Fenders at the local pawnshops and refinishing them to accurate vintage colours helped put Novak through college in the mid-to-late 80s and soon he had customers coming to him for vintage-spec restorations. “I was right in the area where Buddy Holly lived and recorded,” he says, “so there was always a good amount of vintage guitars you could get real cheap. I did a lot of research to get the actual Fender colours from DuPont Duco, and there was an old auto-body shop there that still had the old paint book, so I resurrected the old colours and got that going. Fender used to refer people to me for vintage restoration, but I just didn’t want to be around those chemicals all the time. And by doing all that [finishing] research, I ended up doing a lot of pickup research on the side, and eventually, I got enough where I thought I could figure this out.”

Long before this, his first deep dive into the intricacies of coil winding had come out of necessity. While still in junior high, Novak decided his first electric guitar – a cheap Japanese Strat copy – just didn’t sound as good as it should and he began to suspect the pickups as the culprits. “I convinced my parents to get me a set of Seymour Duncan Strat pickups for Christmas,” he recalls, “and I installed them in the guitar. It was like night and day. They were great, but I didn’t get covers with them and the covers on my cheaper guitar didn’t fit, so they were just in there with raw coils. A friend of my borrowed the guitar and bent the E string down over the coil while he was playing and broke the pickups. For a week, or maybe two weeks, I had really awesome-sounding pickups and then they were broken.

“So my parents were like: ‘See, that’s why we don’t buy stuff for the kids – they break ’em!’ [laughs]. I would stare at these coils, remembering how good they sounded and it was one of those things that I was set to figure out. This was well before the internet and there wasn’t a lot of information on how to do it, or where to get wire and so forth. While I was doing other work, it sat on my bench and eventually, I was able to figure it out and do something that worked.”

WINDUP MERCHANT

Novak says he learned a few things from his pal Jason Lollar and that he used his lab R&D experience – and the bountiful hardware available from local US government surplus stores – to build his own winders… "just like Leo's old winders". He insists that hand-winding his pickups (meaning, hand-guiding the wire onto coils turned by a motorised winder) is one of the major keys to their resultant sound.

As he tells it: "I swore that if I ever grew this bigger than just me, no matter how big it gets, everything is going to be hand-wound. I try not to spend too much time on the science and wondering why that is, but… with the cam-wound, machine-wound pickup, every wrap lies next to every previous wrap and it goes back and forth and it's totally uniform. My theory – and I have zero desire to take it anywhere past a theory – is that what you've done is maximised wire-to-wire contact so the signal's not as rich. Whereas with a random, hand-wound pickup you have really minimised the contact from each wrap." To many pickup enthusiasts, this practice will be known as 'scatter winding,' the technique of layering wrap upon wrap in a semi-random fashion.

Alongside this, Novak also tends to dismiss the notion that there are any 'magic ingredients' that must be included to get a pickup to turn out a certain way. Which is not to say that materials don't matter, but the specifics of components don't matter as much to the overall results as does construction technique – something belied by today's guitarists' obsessions with the minutiae of 'vintage correct' ingredients.

"I used to do a lot more car restorations when I had more time," says Novak, "and the parallel I use is that when people wonder what it is that makes a Camaro so fast, they're wasting their time measuring the thickness of the vinyl on the seats."

VINTAGE WOUND BEATS VINTAGE AGED

Although he feels he's thoroughly debunked the notion that the 'ageing process' itself somehow imparts mystical characteristics to guitars or pickups, Novak does believe a vintage-like approach to manufacturing can make a significant difference, particularly in the extent to which any pickup's coil is wrapped with wire.

"When I was restoring [vintage guitars] and repairing them and going through a lot of them, I just naturally catalogued all of this information. Looking at one thing to the next, it came to me that, you know, Buddy Holly's Strat sounded really good when it was brand new, and Eric Clapton's Blackie and Brownie, when he did the *Layla*… sessions, were just 10-year-old guitars and they really sounded good. And if it is just a factor of age, the 80s Strats would be sounding really good now, and they just *don't*.

"I think it's a handy argument to say when somebody's making something: 'Oh, these don't sound at all like the vintage ones,' and you look at them and everything *looks* the same, so you say: 'Gosh, it must be the age.'"

Instead, Novak discovered long ago that what are now often called 'vintage wound' pickups – those made with fewer wraps of coil wire, therefore exhibiting relatively lower resistance readings – offer the key to greater dynamics, tonal complexity and overall versatility in use, particularly when coupled with other vintage-style manufacturing techniques. "There are things that I've noticed that vintage pickups have that weren't there later," he says, "so I've instituted a lot of those, and I think that's had a lot to do with the sound of the pickups I make. I just didn't follow the typical approach of everyone else."

Regarding hotter, over-wound pickups, Novak notes that some players might indeed want that all-fire-breathing-all-the-time performance, but that you've really got nowhere to go when you try to back out of that. "Back in the day, you know, Joe Strummer played the same Tele that Merle Haggard played and Ritchie Blackmore played the same Strat that Eric Clapton and Buddy Holly played. Where you take it is what matters. Nowadays, they've got all these over-wound pickups and all and they've got a million different artists' Strats, but that artist only ever played the same one that everyone else played, originally. They didn't have all this special stuff.

"But when you start tailoring things to that degree of 'custom' and getting out of that vintage realm… a vintage pickup, you could take it in so many directions, but an over-wound pickup, you can't go that far with them." G

THE COLLECTION

THE ’59 SOUND

WORDS HUW PRICE | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

We travel to London to meet storied rock guitarist Cosmo and his small but stunning collection, which includes what may have been the very first Burst to enter the UK…

> "AROUND 1971, I WAS OFFERED THE KEITH RICHARDS BURST WITH THE BIGSBY. THE GUY DIDN'T WANT TO JUST SELL IT TO ME, HE WANTED TO SWAP IT FOR A SPECIFIC GUITAR"

During his long career as a player with the likes of The Heavy Metal Kids, Curtis Knight, Andy Fraser and Phil Lynott among countless others, Cosmo has owned many historic instruments. It's also a distinct possibility that he's been playing vintage Les Pauls longer than practically anybody else in the UK, so catching up with him presents a rare opportunity to hear more about the pleasures and pitfalls of gigging and recording with some of the world's most desirable vintage guitars.

Right away, we're astonished to learn that Cosmo bought his first Burst in 1963, at the age of just 13 – and has never been without a vintage Les Paul since. "I've always played Bursts," he explains. "The first one I got from McCormack's Music in Glasgow. They weren't very popular then, but I just loved it and it felt great. It was only about £100, although that was a lot of money at the time.

"A friend called Fraser Watson had one and he was in The Poets, The Pathfinders and later, White Trash," Cosmo recalls. "It was the first '59 Burst I saw and played, and Fraser ended up selling it to his friend Danny Kirwan, around 1971.

"Before that, I had a '59 ES-335, but that Burst was it for me. The sound was similar, but bigger, and it was more comfortable. I never really changed from there on; it was either a Burst or a three-pickup Custom. Although I did have an affair with a '59 Flying V that lasted about 10 minutes."

'59 VARIETIES

For a brief period, Cosmo owned one of the most iconic Bursts. "Around 1971, I was offered the Keith Richards Burst with the Bigsby. The guy didn't want to just sell it to me, he actually wanted to swap it for a specific guitar. So, I went into Top Gear in Denmark Street and Sid Bishop managed to find me a '59 ES-175 with PAFs that the guy wanted. It was a good deal, but remember Bursts were only worth around £225 in '71. I kept the Keith Burst until mid 1974, when I damaged the neck. I dropped it and the neck slightly split up the back, but I was still playing it and it still stayed in tune. I ended up selling it to my mate Bernie Marsden, he then sold it and bought 'The Beast'."

PREVIOUS PAGE Cosmo's 'Tommy Burst' revealed in all its heavenly glory

FACING PAGE Like the Keith Burst, the Tommy Burst was fitted with a Selmer licenced Bigsby, which Cosmo removed...

ABOVE ... and kept, of course. Note the seldom-seen original Selmer packaging

An entirely different ’59 Burst takes pride of place in Cosmo’s collection today, and although he has only owned it for a short time, his association with the instrument goes back decades. “I was on tour with The Heavy Metal Kids and Humble Pie in 1973 and we were doing Green’s Playhouse in Glasgow. Somebody told me that there was another Burst in town that was owned by an older guy who was a great jazzer and singer. I said I’d be interested in seeing it and he brought it over. I thought it looked a lot like the Keith one, because it had a Bigsby and they’re only 20 digits apart. The owner’s name was Tommy Gibson and although I tried offering him £500 that night, he didn’t want to sell it. But over the years, we became friends and every year, I would try to buy it. Eventually, the zeros on the end began to build up and this went on for the next 30 years, until I moved house and lost Tommy’s number.”

Thankfully, fate intervened in the form of guitar-tech-to-the-stars, Alan Rogan. “He told me he thought the guitar had been offered to another collector. Fortunately, they hadn’t agreed terms and then Tommy’s son Craig found me through social media. He said Tommy had been looking for me and he

PREVIOUS SPREAD With its 'poker chip' and pickguard removed, the effect of UV light on the original finish is revealed

ABOVE LEFT One of the PCAP-059 'Bumble Bee' tone capacitors in situ

ABOVE RIGHT Much of the original 'Les Paul' silkscreen has worn away

ABOVE Like so many vintage guitars, the Tommy Burst wears its history on its sleeve – or in this instance, on its scratchplate, where its jazz-playing custodian's fingers gradually warped the plastic over time. To hear it in action, check out our video of Barrie Cadogan putting the guitar through its paces at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine

was so upset, because he'd really wanted to sell me the guitar after all these years. The timing was good. I'm mates with Richie Sambora and I was going up to Glasgow the next day, as he was doing the O2. Anyway, as we were staying in the same hotel, I was just hoping Richie wouldn't spot an old brown case come walking through reception! I took Tommy and Craig up to my room and I didn't even negotiate. I just paid Tommy his price. I showed it to Richie at dinner afterwards and as you can imagine, his eyes lit up."

The instrument's pot codes indicate the 42nd week of 1959. Because the US/UK trade embargo was only lifted at the end of '59, David Bower from Gibson UK is fairly sure the Tommy Burst was one of the first two Bursts in the UK. McCormack's took delivery of both at the beginning of 1960 and Tommy bought it at the end of March. "Sadly, nearly a year after buying it from Tommy, I got a phone call from Craig telling me that Tommy had passed away," Cosmo reveals.

Talks with Gibson Custom about producing a Collector's Choice recreation of the guitar reached advanced stages, but unfortunately it wasn't to be. "I wanted them to call it the Tommy Burst or 'Glasgow Burst', in his memory," says Cosmo. "They said to me: 'Looking at this guitar, we've got the rare inverted flame, the guy who first bought it was called Gibson and the serial number is 9-2222. You couldn't make this up.' I signed the contract – they decided to call the 'Gibson Burst', but that series was discontinued before it went into production."

TELE TALES

Setting the Burst aside for a moment, attention turns to a trio of vintage Fenders. "I like Teles, but I'm really an Esquire guy more than a Tele guy," Cosmo tells us. "Mine is a '56 and it has a V-profile neck that gets slightly rounder as you move up towards the body. I think Esquires sound better, I really do. They're so simple and fortunately, this is all-original, including its untouched wiring harness.

"I picked my '58 Tele up a few years ago from a friend and I just think it's awesome. It's completely original and I love the way the ash grain shows up like blue veins. I've owned it since 2006 and it came in from America. I do love this one, it's a monster guitar. It's collector's grade, but it's more worn now than when I got it. Again, it's all-original and sounds nice.

"The Fiesta Red is extremely original. It's a slab 'board from 1960 and although it's a back loader, it has a top-loading bridge from that transition era of

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"I DON'T BELIEVE BURSTS SOUNDED THIS GOOD WHEN THEY WERE NEW, BECAUSE I FEEL THE WOOD FUSES OVER THE YEARS AND GIVES YOU THAT HARMONIC EFFECT"

THIS PAGE Cosmo's love of Bursts has brought him into contact with many of the most famous examples of the breed. The original sales documentation from the Tommy Burst shows it was one of the first two such guitars in the UK

FACING PAGE Cosmo's "awesome" 1958 Telecaster, which he's owned since 2006

'58-'59; Fender didn't waste usable parts, so these bridges with two sets of holes were not depleted until the end of 1962. It's interesting that the three Fenders here are from '56, '58 and '60, but the necks all feel completely different – just like the Gibsons from '56-'60 also all getting slimmer through the years. It makes you wonder who was watching who…"

So, it's back to Bursts – and of all of those we've encountered, none has played better than Cosmo's. Even so, it's clearly a guitar that has seen a lot of use. "It has been played to death," Cosmo agrees, "but the only thing I've done is remove the Bigsby and put its original stoptail and studs back on and had it re-fretted. The pickups and pots have never had a solder break and the pickup covers have never been off. It has a double white at the neck and zebra at the bridge. The Gibson guys loved the fingernail wear on the pickguard and neck-pickup surround. Tommy fitted a rare Bigsby around 1961 that Selmer made while under licence in the UK to distribute them. They look much like a standard B7, but are a few centimetres shorter, so the fixing screw could touch against the stud insert post for grounding. The Gibson guys hadn't seen another one and I even have the original box it came in."

SOME KIND OF MONSTER

Since Cosmo's owned a number of Bursts, we ask how the Tommy Burst compares. "It's a total monster," he explains, "because it has such a big and wide sound. It's so clear and when you're going from chords to lead, every note is so clean and you don't have to adjust. If you throw in a break, it just comes out. You don't get that from reissues in the same way, or even 60s guitars. You don't even get that from all the Bursts. But I don't use pedals, so when I make a mistake, there's no hiding. That's the downside.

"Front pickups vary quite a lot as well," Cosmo tells us. "Some are so overpowering, and others balance quite nicely. When they're really good, they have that woody mellowness and harmonics, with the clarity. "

The debate about what makes Bursts special is never-ending, but we welcome the opportunity to compare notes with someone whose opinions are based on decades of experience of gigging and

recording with the real thing. “The pickups do make a difference, but if you were to put these PAFs in a new guitar and any repro pickups you like in my guitar, the old guitar is still going to sound better. It’s the wood, and not all of them were made with the same wood. Mine has earthy reddish Honduran mahogany, but sometimes, the colour looks more gold and those don’t sound as good. The earlier P-90 Goldtops tend to have the gold-colour mahogany, and even if you stick a couple of PAFs on them, they still don’t come up to it. ’58s tend to have the red mahogany and most of them sound really good, even if everybody wants a ’59,” Cosmo contends.

“The Keith Burst and the ‘Greeny’ both have the red mahogany and they were all made close together in the 9-2000 batch, which is definitely the best by far, apart from a few ’58s.”

We wonder if Cosmo regards weight as a factor? “Heavier ones sound a bit harder,” he observes, “which is fine if you want to play metal, but I prefer lighter ones. I don’t believe Bursts sounded this good when they were new, because I feel the wood fuses over the years and gives you that harmonic effect. Some think it’s the PAFs, but I think it’s the wood. Just listen to the tone when it’s unplugged, that says it all.”

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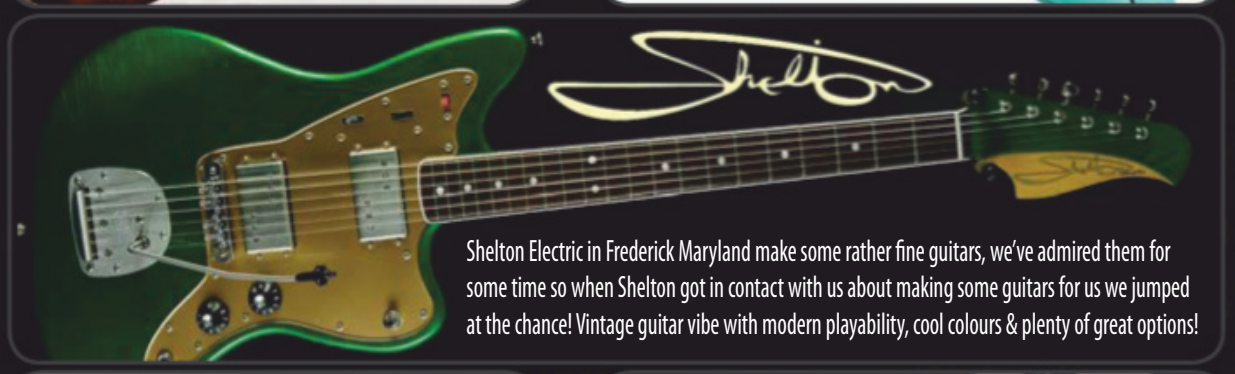

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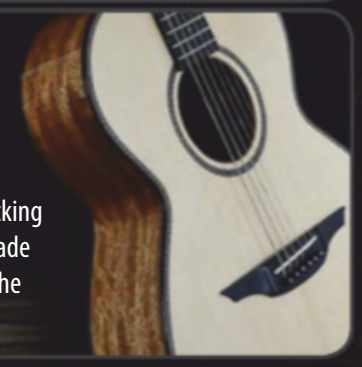

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BY DENNIS FANO

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THIS PAGE This 1960 Fiesta Red Telecaster has a transitional bridge and a stunningly well-preserved decal

Despite being able to lay his hands on such stellar vintage instruments, pragmatism must occasionally prevail – and Cosmo sometimes plays a Les Paul replica, crafted by a renowned builder to his to specs. "I picked out every piece of wood on that guitar," Cosmo points out. "It's based on the Tommy Burst specs and even has the same asymmetrical neck profile. It's got 50s PAFs, pots and Bumble Bees. The bridge is a 1960 ABR-1, because the retaining wire makes sense and it has a vintage tailpiece, scratchplate and knobs. The rings are his own replicas. I have to say, it sounds better than a lot of real Bursts. I have to look down sometimes to see what guitar I'm playing. With that one, it's easy to forget."

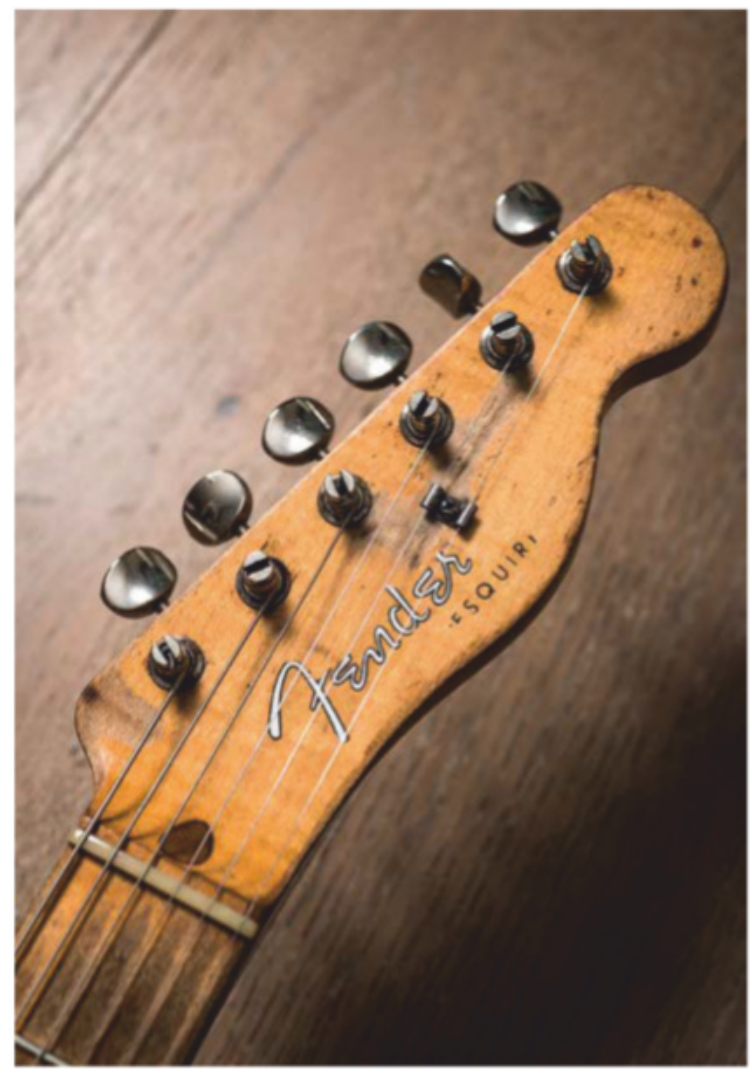
VINTAGE TROUBLE

Our time with Cosmo concludes with a topic that's seldom discussed among originality-obsessed vintage-guitar enthusiasts – namely that we are dealing with very old guitars and many are showing signs of wear and tear. "What I've noticed in the last 10 years or so with a lot of vintage Les Pauls, is that the fingerboards have been so badly shot during various re-frets that it results in insufficient clearance between the strings and pickups when trying to set a comfortably low

THIS PAGE Cosmo's all-original '56 Fender Esquire has a V-profile neck that gets more rounded towards the body end, and a single-ply pickguard

action," Cosmo explains. "You can usually tell how much has been taken off the 'board by the amount of brownness showing through the inlays. Some guitars have ended up with uncomfortably high action, just for the strings to clear the pickups. Other than back-veneering the original 'board and losing the original binding in the process, the only other solution is to take the 'board off a scrapped '55 or '56 Goldtop, if you can find one. It has to be from those years, because those 'boards are the only P-90 models with the right length.

"My luthier Andy Warnock has also had to pop glue under the 'boards of several Bursts and Goldtops because the 'boards are about to fall off," Cosmo recalls, as he relates a cautionary tale for any prospective vintage Les Paul buyer. "I remember we first spotted this problem many years ago. It was a guitar that I'd had re-fretted a couple of times and it just wasn't playing right. Andy started tapping on the 'board and realised that it was moving. He slid a blade under one end and the 'board just popped right off, with the binding intact. He reglued the 'board and the guitar was perfect. When you're looking at any vintage Gibson, you might just want to check that the 'board is still firmly attached…" G



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ROCK SOLID

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE LES PAUL

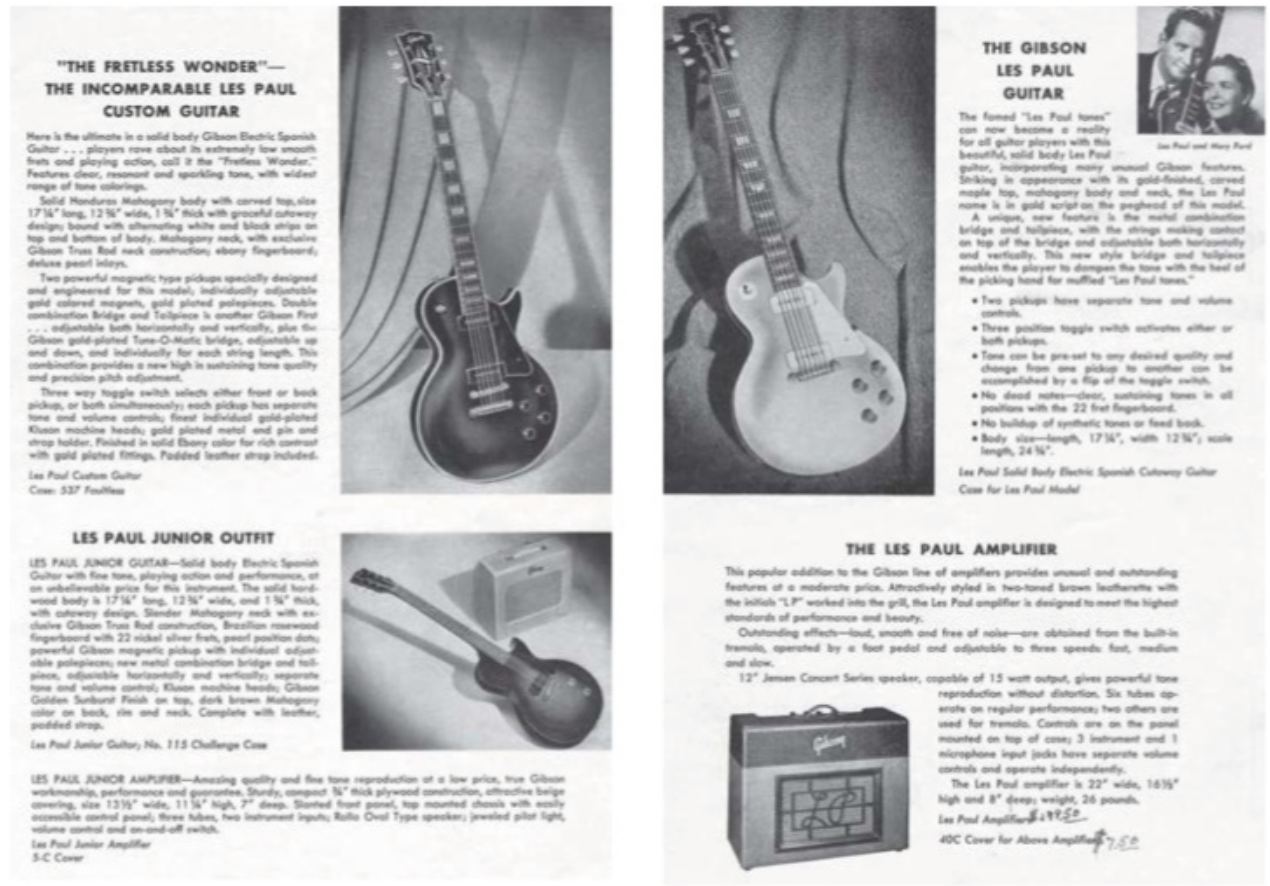
Gibson's Les Paul signature model eventually came to define the sound of rock music – a role it still delights in to this day. Yet its design was a protracted process, with many twists and turns. Here, we present its story first-hand, both from its creators and its most famous players…

WORDS TONY BACON

This is the insider's story of the early days of the Gibson Les Paul, the company's first solidbody electric guitar. Following Fender's introduction of the Broadcaster and Telecaster in 1950 and 1951, Gibson decided to compete, signing up America's most famous guitarist of the time, Les Paul, to endorse its new instrument.

Through the years that followed, Gibson's Les Paul Goldtop (introduced in 1952), Les Paul Custom (1954) and Les Paul Standard or 'Burst' (which replaced the Goldtop in 1958) formed a strong basis for the company's solidbody line, which also featured a couple of budget models: the Les Paul Junior (1954) and the Les Paul Special (1955).

This oral history of the early Les Paul and its famous players comes from the archive of interviews I've done over the years for my books about Gibson. The people you'll hear from are: Billy Gibbons, who was in his pre-ZZ Top band Moving Sidewalks in 1968 when he



ABOVE Catalogues showing Gibson's Les Paul signature line emphasise just how big a draw the endorsee was in the 1950s

FACING PAGE TOP Les Paul and his wife Mary Ford at a press reception at the Savoy Hotel in London, for the 1952 unveiling of the Les Paul signature model. Note the DeArmond Dynasonics under the neck P-90 pickup covers

FACING PAGE BOTTOM Jimmy Page in 1975, the year he bought a backup Burst to deputise for the 'Number One' Les Paul Standard that was his mainstay

acquired a Burst; Ted McCarty, who joined Gibson in 1948 and became its president two years later; Jimmy Page, who got a Les Paul Custom around 1964 and, in Led Zeppelin, bought a Burst from Joe Walsh in 1969; and Les Paul himself – who, with Mary Ford, had scored a US No. 1 hit with *How High The Moon* in 1951.

LES WANTS A LOG

Les Paul

"I'd been trying to make a guitar that sustained and that reproduced the sound of the string with nothing added. No distortion, no change in the response from what the string was doing. I wanted the string to do its thing. No top vibrating, no added enhancement, advantageous or disadvantageous. I wanted to make sure it just gave you the string as the string was excited: you plucked the string, and that's what you got. That was my whole idea way back in the early 30s. I worked on it, worked on it, stuffing rags in guitars, then finally plugging them up completely, making one-inch tops on them. Then finally saying: 'Look, I'm just gonna go on a log.'

"I approached Gibson in 1941. They laughed at the idea, they called me the kid with the broomstick with the pickups on it. The factory was in Kalamazoo, Michigan, but the offices were in Chicago, and that's where I went. The log was what I took to them. I actually built it at Epiphone. I knew the people there, and I could have the factory every Sunday, there was nobody there but the watchman.

"So every Sunday I went and I worked there, from 1939 to '41. Epiphone says, what in the hell is this? I says it's a log, it's a solidbody guitar, and they says, well why? And I says, well… but I was aiming at Gibson, I wasn't aiming at Epi. I knew Epi was about to go under. Gibson was the biggest in the business and that's where I wanted to go. I took it to Chicago to Maurice Berlin, the president of CMI, the [Gibson owning] Chicago Musical Instrument company, and they laughed at it.

"I moved to California, went in the army, went with Bing Crosby, kept playing my log, and Leo Fender came in my backyard, and Merle Travis saw it, so did every other guitar player, every other manufacturer, they all saw it. The vibrola, I started on that in the 30s and then found out that a guy had already invented a vibrola, but it was dead, it was extinct, it died in its tracks. So I said: 'I'll make my own vibrola,' so I made my own and Bigsby came in my backyard, with Fender."

GIBSON WANTS A SOLIDBODY

Ted McCarty

"Trade shows in the late 40s were in Chicago in June and in New York in January or so. We would take prototypes to the show, show them, they'd get a reaction from the dealers – because this was a dealer show, you had to be a dealer to get in – and according to the reaction, we'd go back to the factory and the salesmen would say this is a good seller, this is a good seller, but I couldn't do much with this one. Okay, you've got it. That's how we chose the line, you might say.

"We realised that Leo Fender was gaining popularity in the West with his Spanish solidbody. He didn't get anywhere in New York or this part of the country, it was strictly in the West. I watched him and watched him and I said: 'We've got to get into that business. We're giving him a free run, he's the only one making that kind of guitar.' Had that real shrill sound, which the country and western boys liked. It was becoming popular. So we talked it over and decided, let's make one. Now, Les Paul was known to me, Les Paul was a bit of an innovator, but he played Epiphone. And I had been trying to get him to play Gibson, oh, for a couple of years. He was not going to get shaken away from Epiphone, he was loyal to them. He had made some

improvements, some changes, in his Epiphone that he used. They didn't make an Epiphone with his name on it – everything they made was Epiphone."

DESIGNING THE LES PAUL

Les Paul

"Leo Fender saw what I was doing and he started to make one. And when Gibson heard about it, they said find that guy with the broomstick with the pickup on it! They came round right away, soon as they heard what Leo was doing. They came over to me, and I says: 'Well, you guys are a little bit behind the times. But okay, let's go.'"

Ted McCarty

"We started out to make a solidbody and we had a lot to learn. For instance, the stiffer the material, the harder the wood, the more shrill is the sound, and the longer is the sustain. Hit the string and it would ring for a long sustain period. It could be too long. One of the things we did was to take a piece of iron rail from the railroad track, put a bridge and a pickup and a tailpiece on it, and test it. You could hit that string, take a walk, come back, and it would still be ringing. Because the thing that causes it to slow down is the fact that wood gives a little bit.

"We made a guitar out of solid rock maple. Wasn't good. Too shrill, too much sustain. And we made one out of mahogany. Too soft. Didn't quite have that thing. So we finally came up with a maple top and a mahogany back, made a sandwich out of it, glued them together. Then we decided, now what about the shape? We wanted something that wouldn't be too heavy. The Fender was a much larger guitar, heavier. So we made ours a little smaller bodied, in a traditional shape.

"We had always carved the tops of our fine guitars, and we had real fine carving machines. Leo Fender didn't have any carving machines. They joined their neck with a plate in the back of the guitar. We always glued our neck in, made it an integral part. So I said: 'Okay, let's carve the top of this thing, like we'd do on an L-5 and an L-7.'

"We finally came up with a guitar that was attractive. And as far as we were concerned it had the tone, it had the resonance and it also had the sustain, but not too much. Now we needed an excuse to make it. None of the other major guitar companies had anything to do with a solidbody. Their attitude was forget it, because anyone with a bandsaw can make a solidbody guitar. Bandsaw and a router, that's all you needed.

"So I got to thinking. At that time, Les Paul and Mary Ford were riding very high, they were probably the number-one vocal team in the United States. They were earning a million dollars a year. And knowing Les and Mary, I decided maybe I ought to show this guitar to them."

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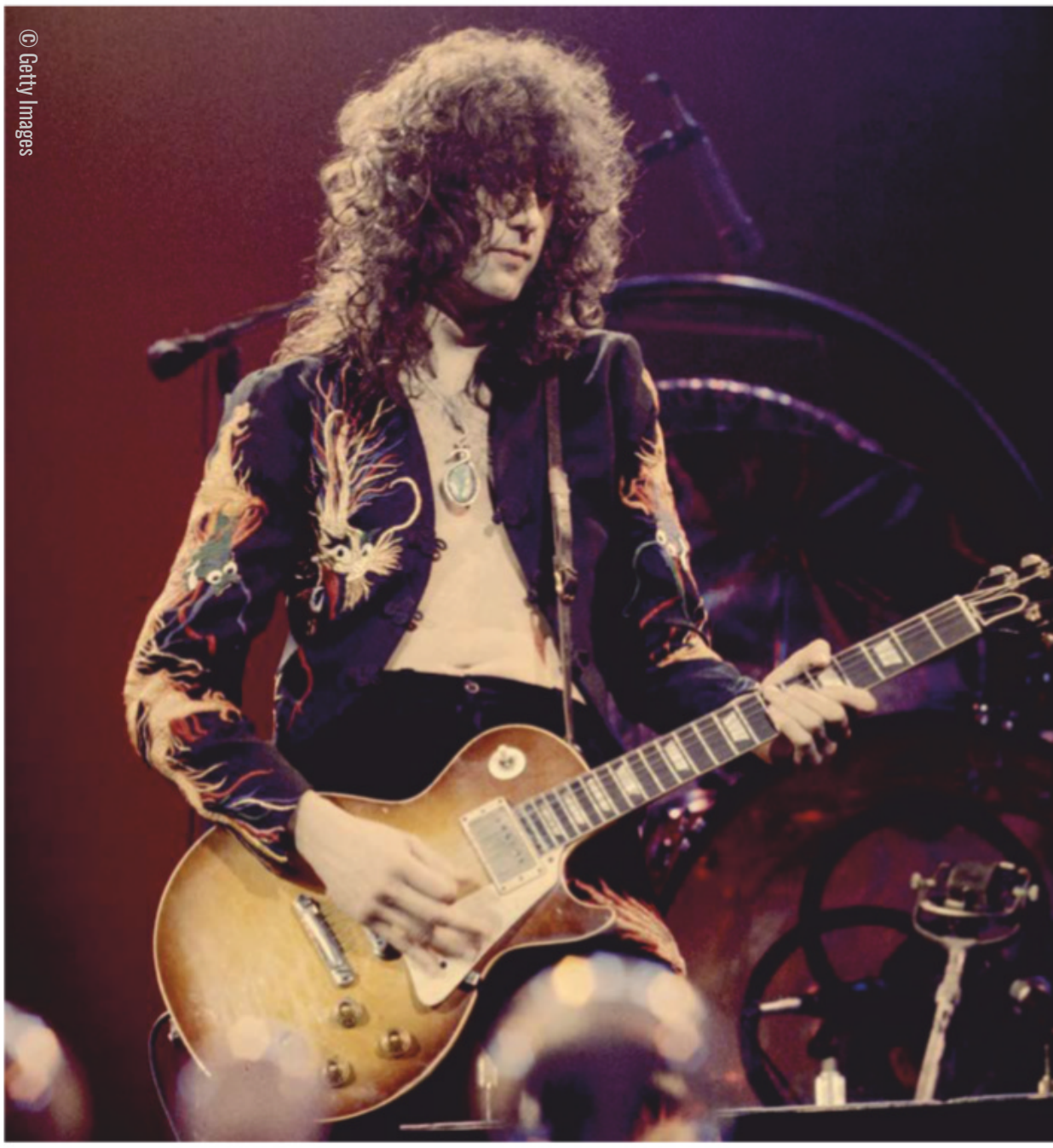
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"I SAID: 'I'VE GOT SOMETHING HERE, LES, THAT I'D LIKE YOU TO SEE.' WE HAD AN AMP AND WE HOOKED THIS GUITAR UP. HE PLAYED IT – AND HE PLAYED IT AND HE PLAYED IT..."

FACING PAGE LEFT The Log – Les Paul's original prototype

FACING PAGE RIGHT This beautiful '59 Burst was the inspiration for Gibson Custom's 2016 Minnesota Burst, 39th in a series of painstaking recreations of storied instruments

FACING PAGE BOTTOM The lack of fingerboard binding and the diagonal bridge pickup height-adjustment screws denote that this now-heavily modded 1952 Goldtop model is one of the first ever made

MAKING THE DEAL

Ted McCarty

"Les and his group were at a hunting lodge in Delaware Water Gap, which is up in the mountains in Pennsylvania. I had been talking to Les by phone, and I talked to Phil Braunstein, his financial manager, a New York accountant. So I made a date with Phil, flew into New York, had breakfast, got in his car, and I had this [prototype] guitar with me.

"It was an all-day drive from New York down there, we got there at night, pouring down with rain, a miserable night. "I said: 'I've got something here, Les, that I'd like you to see.' We had an amplifier and we hooked this guitar up to it. He took it, and he played it – and he played it and he played it. There was this balcony upstairs with bedrooms leading off it, and Mary Ford was upstairs, so he hollered up: 'Mary, come down here, I want you to see this.'

"Mary came down. He says: 'Play this, Mary, I want to hear and see what you think of it.' She took it and played it, and she said: 'I love this.' Les said, 'Let me have it,' and he played it some more, and he turned to Mary and said: 'Look, they're getting too close to us, Mary, I think we ought to join them. What do you think?' She says: 'I like it.'"

Les Paul

"It was a flat-topped guitar at that time, it was not an archtop. I designed everything on there except the belly, the arched top. I had a flat-top. I sat there with Maurice Berlin at CMI, and he said: 'You know, I like violins.' And he took me through his vault and showed me his collection, and he says: 'Would you consider making it in an archtop?', and I said I'd love it. He said: 'Nobody else – Fender, nobody else – can do that, and we have the facilities to do it.' So I said: 'By all means, let's do it.' So we made them."

Ted McCarty

"Les had taken his Epiphone and had made a lot of changes to it, put some pickups on it that he had made. I had been after him for a couple of years, trying to talk him into Gibson, hadn't been successful. So I said: 'That's what we want to do, we want to call this the Les Paul model.' I told him that we would pay him a royalty. I'm not an attorney, and nor was Phil Braunstein, nor was Les. So we started making a contract. And I have a theory about contracts. The more simple they are, the better they are. If you have five pages of gobbledegook, what I call 'boilerplate', you hire a smart lawyer and he'll find loopholes in it. A simple one, anyone can understand. So we started out on it, first thing we did was write out how much we would pay him per guitar.

"We agreed it all that night. So I came back to the factory and now we had a Les Paul model. I'd been trying to get Les to let us make him a guitar for years, with no success, but we finally had something that he liked. So then we started to produce them."

GOLDTOP/CUSTOM/BURST

Ted McCarty

"We did the gold finish because it covered the blemishes in the wood, the cosmetic appearance. If it was maple [like the later Burst], it had to be fiddleback maple, had to be perfect, couldn't have any blemishes, couldn't have any mineral streaks in it. But we used to cover it up with that [gold] paint.

"We added the Les Paul Custom just to have another one. You have all kinds of players out there that like this and like that. Chevrolet has a whole bunch of models, Ford has a whole bunch of models. And there was a good reason for it. We were having more and more of a problem getting real good clear mahogany from Honduras. We'd get mahogany and it'd have streaks in it and whatnot. So that Les Paul

Custom was a solidbody, it was not a sandwich, it was solid mahogany, but painted black. So you had some with streaks in it? You made Customs out of it. Dolled it up fancy with binding and other things on it, and sold it for a higher price."

BILLY'S DIVINE MUSIC WITH PEARLY GATES

Billy Gibbons

"This guy I knew in Houston, John Wilson – he had a Rickenbacker 12-string, they sounded like The Byrds, they were called The Magic Ring – he rang one day and said: 'Hey, word is you're looking for one of those Les Pauls.' I said yeah. He said: 'There's a farmer, a rancher, up the road, just outside the city limits, big ranch out there, a big cattle man, cattle and horses. Well, he's got one of those things.'

"We had secured a 1936 Packard automobile, and we had a friend of the band, Renee Thomas, she had an opportunity to audition in California to win a part in a movie, so we gave her the Packard. She called up, says she's in California and she got the part. Well, finally she sold the beater Packard and sent me this cheque for, I think, $350. I swear, the cheque arrived in the mail, and my buddy pulls up and said: 'Hey, let's go out see about that guitar.'

“IT’S HYPOTHETICAL, BUT I MAY NOT HAVE COME UP WITH THE RIFF OF *WHOLE LOTTA LOVE* ON THE TELE. THAT FAT SOUND YOU’RE WORKING WITH, YOU’RE INSPIRED”

ABOVE This 1956 Les Paul Custom has a ‘staple’ single coil in the neck position. The Custom was introduced in 1954 to fulfil Les Paul’s wish for a more luxurious-looking guitar that looked “like a tuxedo”

We get there, the guy said: ‘You want it, you can have it.’ I said, ‘How much you want?’ He says: ‘How much you got?’ I pulled the cheque out and says I just got this today, $350. He says: ‘I’ll take it.’ So I took off with that guitar!

“We had named that car Pearly Gates and when Renee sold it, I called her back, I said: ‘I got this guitar with the money.’ She goes, ‘Well, we’re gonna call that guitar Pearly Gates and you’re gonna play divine music.’

“I’ll tell you, man, that is some kind of guitar! This was 1968, right after summer. I’ve wondered along the way why this particular example of the Les Paul [’59 Burst] is so robust. Really, the only explanation is that it just happened to be put together on the right day. The right combination of wood.

“It was all guesswork back in those days. The particular day that all of the disparate elements came together was just that magical moment, I suppose.”

JIMMY’S MOVES: CUSTOM/TELE/BURST

Jimmy Page

“I got my [three humbucker] Les Paul Custom in the 60s… there was Selmer’s [shop in Charing Cross Road] and then there was one further on, at the time it was affiliated somehow, called [Lew Davis], and I bought it in there. I remember going in and there was a sort of cash desk, and the guys behind it, and right up on the wall… I said: ‘Oh my god, let me try that!’ What it was doing in there and why, but it was there. It was just… I fell in love with the bloody thing.

“There weren’t many around. It was just such a gorgeous-looking thing and it sounded so wonderful. The middle setting wasn’t what you’d expect it to be, but it was a really spiky sound that was really superb. I customised it with some switches so you could get into any combination, and [in 1970] it was the one that got stolen.

“In 1969, Joe Walsh turned up at The Fillmore or Winterland, one or the other, in San Francisco and he bloody insisted, he said: ‘You’ve got to buy this guitar!’ [It became Page’s ‘Number One’ Burst.] And it actually looked as though it’d been refinished. I said: ‘I don’t necessarily need it.’ ‘No, you’ve got to have it, just try it, you’ll want it,’ and all that. I said: ‘I’ve already got the Custom.’ ‘No, no, you’ve got to try it! You’ve got to buy this guitar!’

“He kept insisting. I said: ‘Ah, no, no, no, I can’t afford it. You know how it is.’ This wasn’t like dealing with Selmer’s. He was really sporting – he’s still sporting about it now. Because everyone goes oh, you sold him a Les Paul for whatever it is, hundreds of dollars. It was a pro-rata price, he wasn’t stealing me up and he wasn’t giving it to me as a present.

“I knew it was a good guitar. I knew there wouldn’t be the feedback, the squealing I got from my Telecaster, which every night there was a whole episode of controlling that. The first album is done on the Telecaster, because it is a transition from The Yardbirds to Led Zeppelin, it’s exactly the same guitar. Everybody had that if they started turning up a Telecaster loud. So Joe insisted that I bought it, and I did buy it, and I kicked off the second album with it.

“There’s no guarantee that I would have played the… I don’t know, it’s hypothetical, but I may not have come up with the riff of *Whole Lotta Love* on the Telecaster. That fat sound you’re working with, you are inspired – well, I am – and I know other people are, by instruments, the sound of the instruments. And then they’re playing something they haven’t played before – and it’s really user-friendly, and suddenly they’ve got some sort of riff, which is peculiar to that moment. I’m not saying that’s the first thing I played on it, but it was to come.

“I always knew the Les Paul was a really user-friendly guitar over, say, a Strat or something like that. It’s really sympatico. So many things start singing, you know? Really singing.” G

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INDUSTRY INSIDER

1981 INVENTIONS

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

How did a pedal-builder from Nashville produce the most sought-after new stompbox on the planet? We chat to 1981 Inventions main man Matthew Hoopes about how the DRV became an online phenomenon…

How did you get into guitar?
"My mom taught me how to play guitar. She had an old classical guitar around the house and she would play kids' songs at school and church growing up. She had a background in folk music, and she helped me learn my first few chords and how to strum. I was immediately hooked. I wanted to learn my favourite songs and come up with my own stuff right away. I remember in high school having a guitar in hand all the time, playing along with commercials on TV and songs on the radio."

When did you first start building pedals?
"I had an early interest in pedals, from my first pedal – the fabled DOD Grunge – to, later on, a wider range of vintage and boutique pedals, as well as a growing Boss collection. I always was interested in guitar sounds and textures, building pedalboards, and endlessly tweaking knobs. At one point, I picked up a reissue RAT pedal and I very much connected with it. I liked how I could finally make my distortion sound dark enough. It wasn't long after that I started reading about tweaking the circuit, changing to the LM308 op-amp, LED mods, high gain, low gain, Ruetz… I picked up a few modded RATs and then started doing things on my own. And then it actually wasn't until a few years ago that I came across a 1985 Whiteface RAT that completely inspired me and helped solidify the direction of my first release with 1981 Inventions."

What was the moment you realised that you could turn your hobby into a business?
"I've been tinkering with this idea for about four years, with much help from Jon Ashley of Bondi Effects, who is a close friend. My main goal was to make a pedal that was unique and specific to my sound, but still with a vintage-minded approach. I decided pretty early on that I wanted to release the pedal. I thought that a few people might be interested in it, but I had no idea that it would reach as wide as it has. So to answer your question, I released my first run to the public late one night this past June [2018], and when I woke up I had completely sold out. It was definitely at that moment when I thought that this could be a viable business."

What was the biggest helping hand when you were starting out?
"The main thing that has helped me has been people within the industry reaching out a helping hand. This started with Jon of Bondi Effects, but it's been very positive that so many friends and colleagues were willing to reach out and offer support/encouragement/feedback/advice, and just experience from doing it. My pre-order model has allowed me to keep things small, and to grow slowly. Also, I still do the majority of the work myself, but at the beginning, I was doing almost every part of production."

At what point did you feel like you 'nailed' your branding?
"I don't feel like it was an 'Aha!' moment, but more so growing attached to it over time. My brain tends to take a long time to attach to a decision. My logo and branding concepts were made by a friend. I really liked it right away, but I kicked around the concept to a few friends who do graphic design professionally. Ultimately, I felt that the more I saw other options, the more sure I was in the right spot already. Minimal design and negative space is very important to me, and also to have a sort of personality and vibe with it is important, and I feel like this branding accomplishes that."

How did you come up with the DRV?
"It's a distortion pedal based on a 1985 Whiteface RAT. It is designed and engineered by Jon Ashley of Bondi Effects, and I owe a lot of the credit to him and his ear. It isn't the first idea that I had for a pedal and Jon and I threw out four or five ideas over the past few years. I ultimately felt very inspired by the RAT, and felt that

The 1981 Inventions DRV is inspired by Matthew Hoopes' 1985 Whiteface ProCo RAT distortion

it was a missing piece of available gear, even for myself. There are a lot of interesting things going on internally that give it a different flavour than a RAT. It has a preamp in front, which is a fixed level and always on (which is how I run my pedalboard), it has about 1/20th the amount of gain from a traditional RAT circuit, but still gets plenty fuzzy. What we weren't expecting when lowering the gain was the amount of spectrum that opened up in the low-gain regions, kind of a space where preamp meets low-gain distortion, which I hadn't heard before in a guitar pedal. We adjusted the low end, midrange, filter sweep, level, switching system, LED, and most notably added filtering to simulate some of my favourite LM308 chips, but it's interesting because I found that several other IC chips sound good in the DRV, but not the 308. Anyway, not to get into all of that, but it was a long time in the design and tweaking phase, even after choosing the direction. I feel that the nuance of the sound is important."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?
"I feel most proud when I think of sending off my first batch of pedals. They went out into the world, to many people I didn't know – and that was really fulfilling. I also really love being there when someone plugs in my pedal for the first time and dials in a sound, and just smiles really big – nothing beats that moment."

"I FEEL MOST PROUD WHEN I THINK OF SENDING OFF MY FIRST BATCH OF PEDALS. THEY WENT OUT INTO THE WORLD, TO MANY PEOPLE I DIDN'T KNOW – AND THAT WAS REALLY FULFILLING"

What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the guitar industry in 2019?
"I see a lot of back-and-forth about digital processing versus amplifiers. It will be interesting to see where things land, but I feel like for me, if I can play through tubes and speakers, then I will always do that. I'd like to someday get into digital design, such as Pro Tools plug-ins, etc. Sourcing is always an issue. I was not expecting that. I didn't realise that sometimes, you just couldn't get a certain knob or part, and if you order more, it will take months."

What are your plans for the future?
"I have a few ideas that I'm working on, and I do plan to make more pedal designs. My line of thinking is to make things for my personal pedalboard and then release the ones that stay. I'm currently working on a vintage-based preamp pedal, which is a type of pedal that I am completely obsessed with. I also plan on doing some really fun colours for the DRV in the very near future. I plan to widen my production base, and to be able to create and send out more pedals into the world!"

For more on 1981 Inventions, visit 1981inventions.com

THE RUNDOWN

THE BEST WEIRD EFFECTS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Sometimes, you just want to force your guitar to make some crazy sounds – here are eight of the finest esoteric noisemakers you can place on your pedalboard…

CHASE BLISS AUDIO WARPED VINYL MKII

1 Boasting an all-analogue signal path, this boutique pedal offers comprehensive digital control over vibrato and chorus sounds, designed to create sounds reminiscent of a warped old LP. This results in a library of unique modulations, warbles, gargles and pitch-based effects, which can be further tweaked and refined by a series of DIP switches on the top of the unit.

RED PANDA PARTICLE

2 The Particle is a 'granular delay', which uses the principles of granular synthesis to chop up your guitar signal in real time and then does a range of "trippy, robotic things" to the sound. In reality, this means it creates interactions between three pitch modes and five delay modes to create everything from modulated delay shimmers to extreme glitchy rhythms and kaleidoscopic pitch-shifted alien modulation patterns.

HOLOGRAM ELECTRONICS INFINITE JETS

3 Beloved by experimental guitar wizards such as Radiohead's Ed O'Brien, the Infinite Jets is a re-synthesiser pedal that tracks and samples the notes you play and then reinterprets those notes using two channels of infinite sustain. This results in a plethora of ambient soundscapes, from glitching granular loops to distorted delay and vibrato and beyond.

DR SCIENTIST FRAZZ DAZZLER

4 Canada's Dr Scientist has a reputation for innovative and esoteric effects and the Frazz Dazzler is no exception. this sci-fi fuzz offers a huge range of tone-shaping potential thanks to a full three-band EQ, but most interesting is the Volts control. This enables you to alter how much juice the circuit gets, allowing you to force glitchy, gated space-age sounds.

ZVEX EFFECTS FUZZ PROBE VEXTER

5 What happens when you mix a fuzz pedal with a theremin? Well, you get the Fuzz Probe from maverick US effects maker Zachary Vex, and what a strange, fun marriage it is. By moving your hand or foot in proximity to the copper antenna on the pedal, you can use the Stab control to create feedback-heavy fuzz squeals and glitches ideally suited to set-ending wig-outs.

CATALINBREAD CSIDMAN

6 Do you remember the days of portable CD players? Do you also remember how they'd skip and jump at the merest bump or jolt? Well… the Csidman takes that glitchy, jumpy quality and adds it to a delay pedal. It might sound odd, and it is. But it adds a musical and intuitive level of randomness to your tones that few other pedals can match.

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES RAINBOW MACHINE

7 Billed as a 'Polyphonic Pitch Mesmerizer', EarthQuaker proudly states that "no natural sounds that come from this box". Instead, what you get is lashings of powerful polyphonic arpeggiated harmonies. If great-sounding pitch-shifted harmonised craziness is your bag, the Rainbow Machine will provide you with a broad palette of colours to play with.

WMD GEIGER COUNTER

8 If you wanted to, you could use the Geiger Counter as a decent regular overdrive pedal, but you'd be doing your inner wild child a disservice. The overdrive stage feeds into an 8-bit computer that mangles the sound into everything from impossible amounts of gain, to multiple-octave foldover, digital-data errors and sculpted noise madness.

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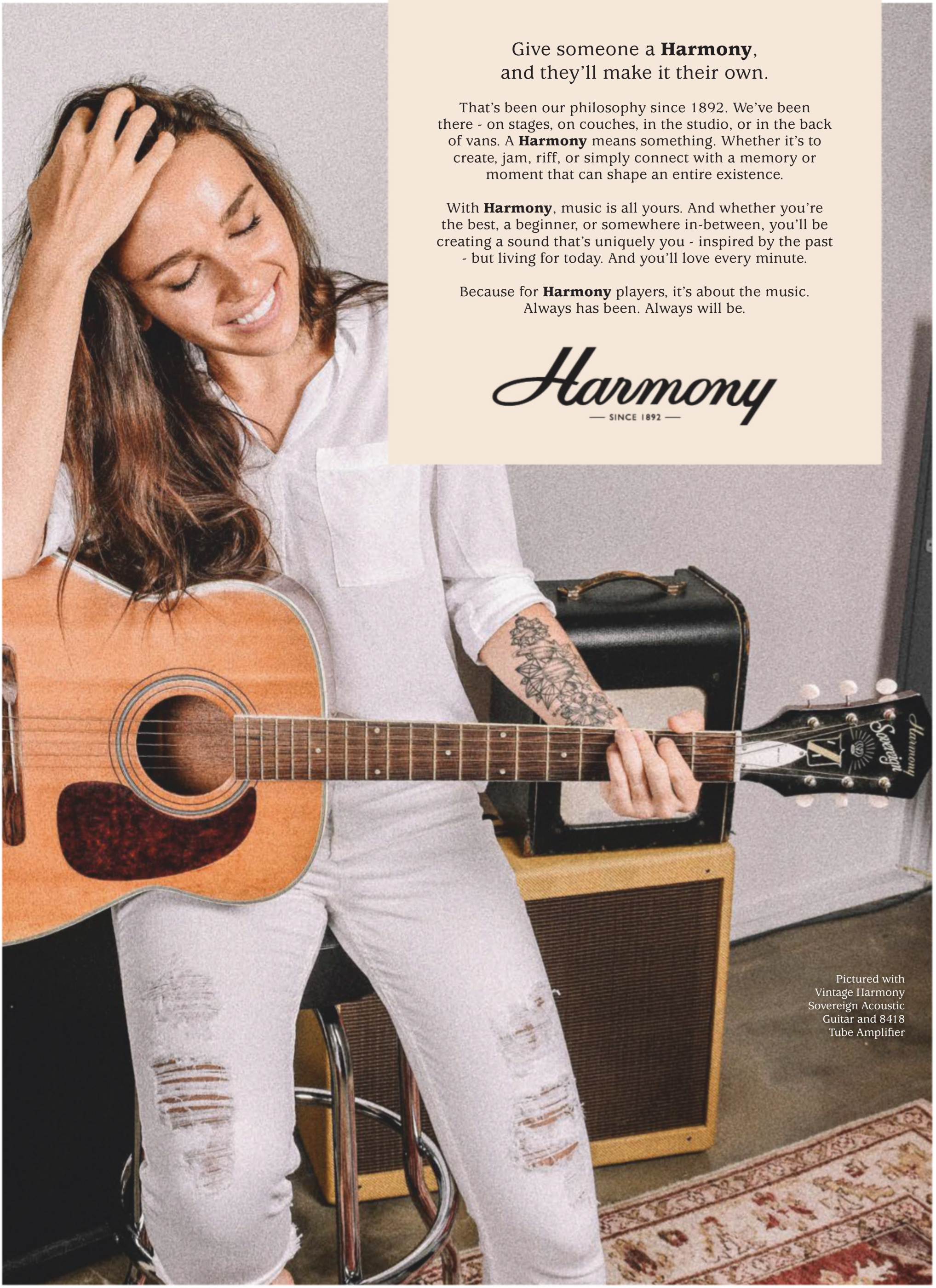

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FENDER
AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC TELECASTER

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

A flexible new hybrid that dovetails with the needs of modern guitarists, or a clever way to sell Telecasters to the buoyant acoustic market? Time to put Fender's big NAMM 2019 launch under the microscope…

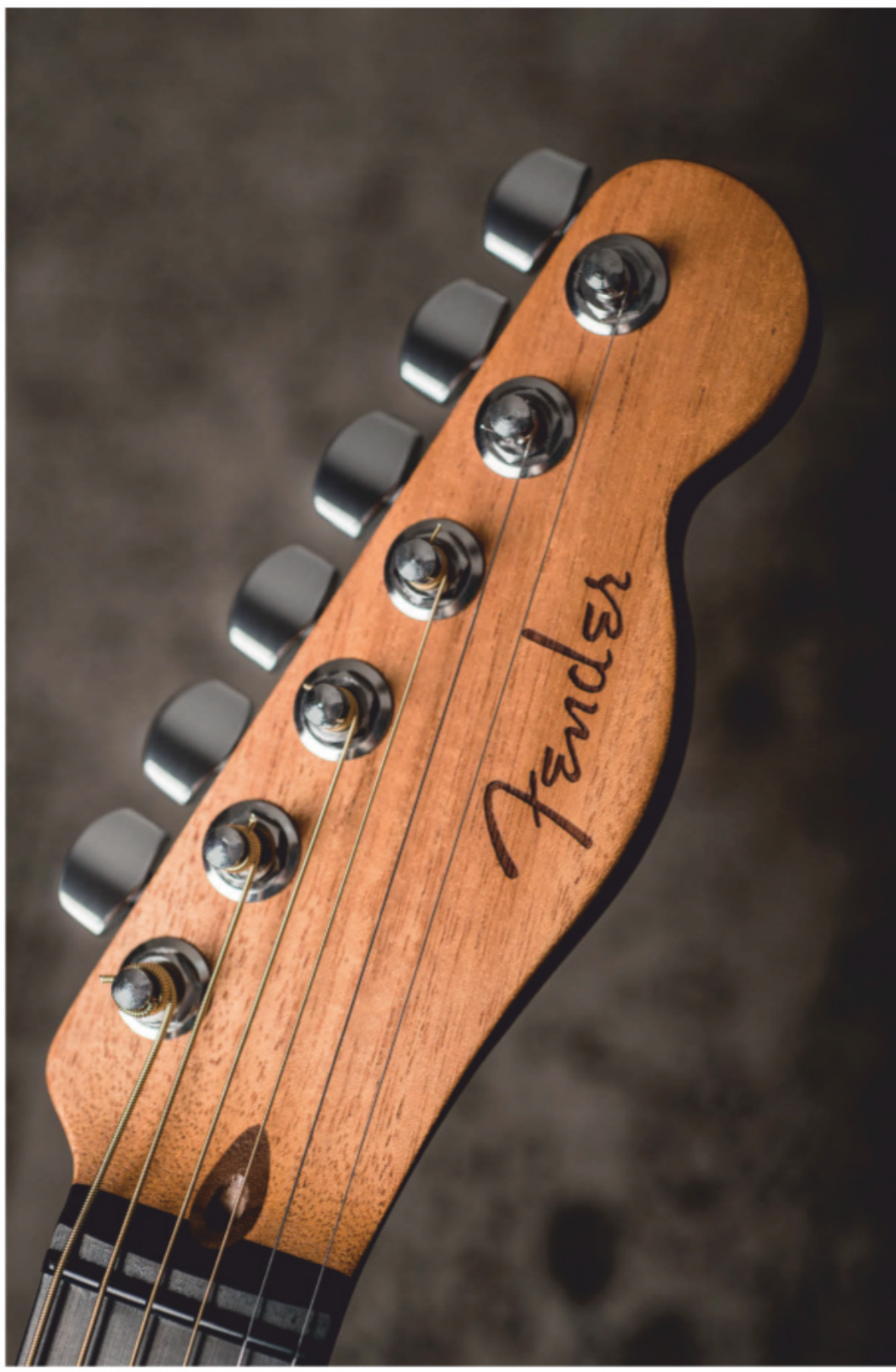
When we first heard whispers that Fender's biggest NAMM 2019 release was a line of USA-made acoustics, it felt like something of a curveball. Over the years, the brand that popularised the modern solidbody electric has had an on/off relationship with acoustic instruments, although the Paramount and California series of recent times prove that the current Fender chiefs take the needs – and dollars – of unplugged players seriously.

When the news broke a couple of days ahead of NAMM that the new American Acoustasonic Telecaster was a lot more than a simple acoustic instrument, things became much clearer. A Telecoustic this is not.

The design may be new for 2019, but its name isn't. 'Acoustasonic' has been used by Fender in the past for a range of acoustic-guitar amplifiers, a Strat-shaped electro-acoustic and most significantly, the previous Acoustasonic Telecaster model, launched nearly a decade ago. A hybrid design hewn from chambered ash with a spruce centre-block, the 2010 model was manufactured in Ensenada, Mexico and fitted with a Fishman undersaddle piezo bridge, a side-mounted Aura preamp and Twisted Tele neck pickup for more traditional electric sounds.

Though its progenitor was in many ways more Telecaster than acoustic, this time around, Fender has made the physical architecture more acoustic-like and considerably more innovative. Construction takes place on the USA side of the border, primarily in a dedicated space upstairs in the company's Corona factory, and the guitar has been equipped with a new Fender and Fishman-designed 'Acoustic Engine' to deliver a range of flat-top voices as well as Telecaster bridge-pickup tones.

2019's Acoustasonic Telecaster arrives in an impressively robust FE1225 soft case that feels several cuts above Fender's usual Deluxe gigbag. Before you say, "at this price, there should be a hard case," not everyone will agree. For solo performers using public transport to get to their gig with a live rig that consists of simply a guitar and a looper pedal, a high-quality gigbag with backpack-style straps is always preferable to a heavy hard case in terms of comfort and portability. Here, the guitar is well protected by extensive padding and moveable neck cushion-pads, while the bag itself is bolstered against wear and tear by heavy-duty rubber at the corners and around



KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,799 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway hybrid six-string guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Solid Sitka spruce top with mahogany back and sides, bolt-on mahogany neck with 'Modern Deep C' profile, 12-inch-radius ebony fingerboard with dot inlays and 22 narrowtall frets, B-Flex truss-rod with headstock end adjustment, GraphTech Tusq nut
HARDWARE Modern Asymmetrical bridge with GraphTech Tusq pins, Fender Standard Cast/Sealed Staggered chrome machineheads
ELECTRICS Master volume, Mod, 5-way blade voice selector switch, magnetic Fender N4 bridge pickup, Fishman under-saddle piezo and internal body sensor
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 51.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.9mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.9mm at nut, 53.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 5.1lb/2.31kg
FINISH Surf Green (as reviewed), Black, Natural, Sonic Gray, Sunburst
CONTACT Fender EMEA fender.com

the strap-button area. The larger of the two external pockets also includes scope to keep tools and accessories organised.

Inside the bag, we encounter our Acoustasonic Telecaster in perhaps the most polarising of its five standard finishes – Surf Green. We like it, but if you don't then there's a more conservative palette of Black, Natural, Sunburst and Sonic Gray from which to choose. NAMM also saw Fender exhibit a range of Acoustasonics in more elaborate finishes such as a distressed stars and stripes design, so don't expect the book to be closed on colour or wood options.

The finish itself is a thin open-pore poly that retains a woody, natural feel – it's very appealing indeed on a tactile level and isn't prone to squeaky handling noise. The organic feel is reaffirmed via ebony control knobs – we'd have been tempted to continue this theme by using ebony for the voice selector switch tip and tuning keys, too. The inset solid Sitka spruce top is home to the semi-transparent Surf Green finish, through which a nicely straight grain is visible. Fender tells us that the top is printed, rather than sprayed.

Opening up the pickup cavity around the back gives us a sneak peek at the Acoustasonic Telecaster's anatomy. The natural mahogany back and sides are CNC routed from two centre-joined sections

that act as a 'frame' (including the radiused edges and arm chamfer) into which the spruce top is set. The specially tuned sound port (aka Fender's patent-pending 'Stringed Instrument Resonance System') is a mahogany hoop that's glued into the soundhole but doesn't touch the back, while the top itself is supported by a pair of parallel longitudinal 'transverse' braces. Almost like archtop bracing, these run the length of the top on either side of the sound port.

The neck is mahogany, and it also features an attractive ebony fingerboard with streaks of light brown visible in the upper registers. There was a time when anything less than jet-black ebony would have been considered inferior, but sustainability-conscious players and builders have started to turn received wisdom on its head – and the world of guitar-making is all the better for it.

"The design, size, location, and depth [of the sound port] all contribute to the voicing of the instrument and give it a fuller voice on your lap," says Fender's vice president of guitar R&D, Brian Swerdfeger. "This voicing, in concert with the movement of the top, are major components of what you hear when the guitar is plugged in.

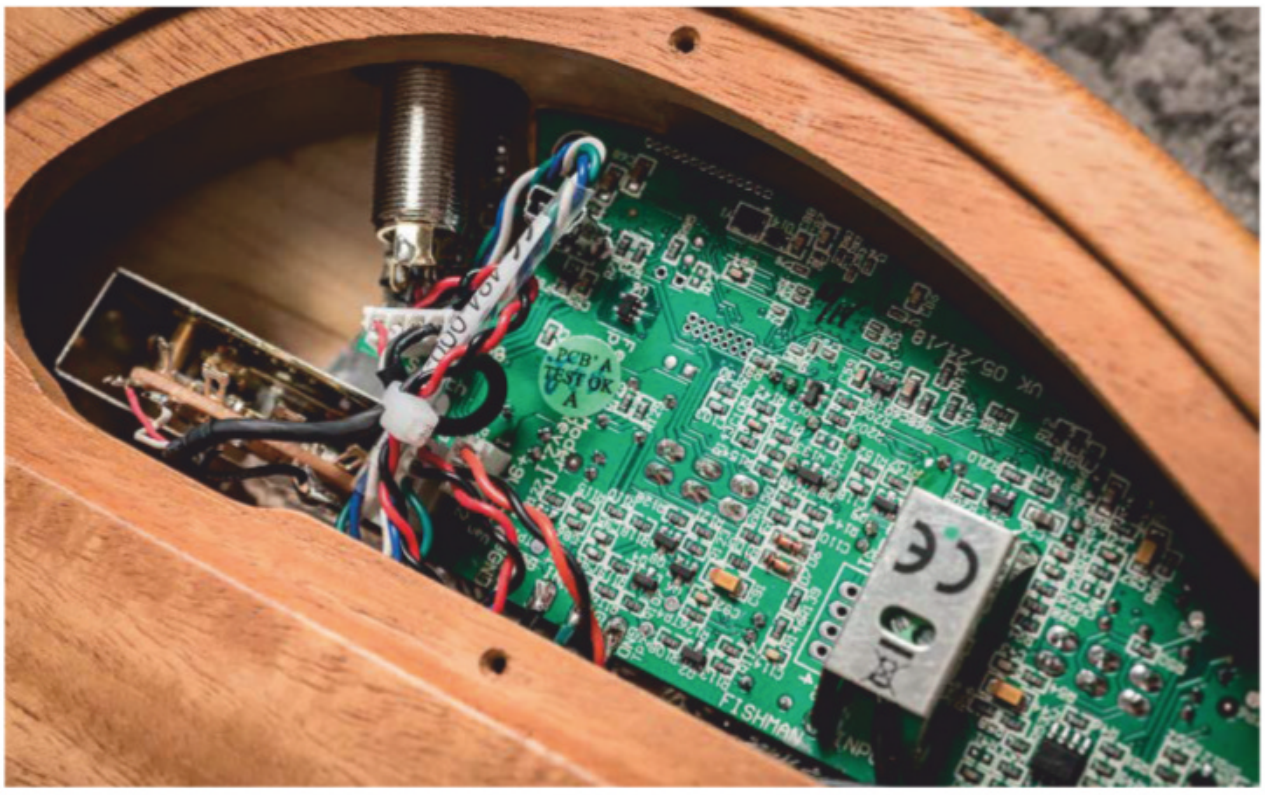
"The inset spruce top, mahogany body, braces and sound port deliver all of the attack, sustain, decay, release and dynamics that give the guitar its organic feel and core voice," he continues. "The electronics are all new and bespoke for this guitar. The challenge was combining new analogue and future digital circuits in such a way to enhance what the guitar is doing naturally and to not overtake it."

The electronic elements comprise Fishman Under-Saddle Piezo and an Internal Body Sensor alongside a Fender N4 noiseless magnetic pickup. If three pickups were a challenge to combine in theory, in practice, the system allows easy access to a huge array of tones via the five-way blade voice selector, master volume and Mod knob. The latter control blends between two distinct voices in each of the five positions.

Integrated into the Electrosocket-style output jack plate is a micro-USB connector via which the guitar's lithium-ion battery is charged. Fully charged, you'll get approximately 20 hours of playing time, while a blinking red LED is the warning sign that you have less than an hour of battery life left. Helpfully, you can recharge the battery while playing, so there's no need to panic at a gig if you have a suitable power source on your pedalboard or nearby.

IN USE

In an ideal world, when it comes to that big acoustic number, a singer-songwriter will reach for their pre-war D-45, mic'd immaculately with a pair of vintage Neumanns. Time to rip out that country-fried solo when the band comes in? No problem, the guitar tech is waiting stage-side with a vintage Blackguard Telecaster. The reality, of course – whether you are playing a solo pub gig at an open-mic night, or switching between electric and acoustic in a band halfway up a festival bill



– usually involves a considerable amount of compromise on the dream scenario we've just outlined.

One of the most impressive things about the Acoustasonic Telecaster is that, despite its problem-solving capabilities, it doesn't feel like a compromise. Instead, it's an instantly likeable, inspiring tool that opens doors rather than closing them. Purely as a physical object that makes acoustic sound, its louder-than-expected voice is just about perfect for the living room and easy to sing over. And the radiused body edges, forearm chamfer and compact dimensions mean that it sits snugly on your lap. The only downside of the lightweight body is that there's a little neck dive when strapped on, so if you plan to perform standing with this guitar, then a wide guitar strap will help.

Although the open-pore satin finish and supplied Fender Dura-Tone 0.011-0.052 coated phosphor-bronze strings give the guitar a very 'acoustic' feel, the appealing 'Modern Deep C' neck profile (inherited from the American Professional solidbody series) and contoured heel deliver all the benefits of a comfy modern electric. This includes easy access to higher registers and even full-step bends at the 22nd fret, should the need arise. Lightly rolled fingerboard edges and rounded fret ends make for a smooth and unobtrusive ride for the fretting hand and the deceptively simple Tim Shaw-designed bridge saddle offers excellent solidbody-like intonation. This likely aided by the fact that the top is much less mobile than that of the average X-braced flat-top acoustic.

Our first port of call for amplified testing is the instrument's menu of pure 'acoustic' voices, and first impressions are very positive. Piezo-driven sounds are not favoured by everyone, but we've certainly heard far more synthetic and brittle-sounding plugged-in tones from the pickup systems on full-bodied, traditionally constructed flat-tops – interestingly, using the instrument through a clean electric amplifier helps attenuate some of the more hi-fi piezo characteristics and makes for a somewhat woodier and rootsier range of tones.

The voice selections offer a broad range of acoustic characters based on popular tonewood combinations and body shapes and the ability to sweep through a blend of two voices in each position using the Mod knob is very useful when fine-tuning the way in which a particular part sits in a band mix. Position 5/Mod A's take on a Sitka spruce/rosewood dreadnought is probably our favourite acoustic all-rounder for both chords and fingerpicking – given the choice, we'd probably trade Position four/Mod A's Engelmann spruce/maple small-body voice for an all-mahogany parlour tone with more of a dustbowl vibe.

Now you've lulled your audience into a false sense of security with your sensitive singer-songwriter schtick, it's the perfect time to flick the Acoustasonic's pickup switch to the back setting, where the magnetic pickup comes into play. Position 1/Mod B's fat/semi-clean electric voice is punchy, gritty and brash without being glassy – even through a dedicated acoustic amplifier or flat-response PA. For 60s beat and power pop, it's surprisingly dead on (think *I Can't Explain*); add some slapback and it's Nashville honky-tonk all the way, even if country bends are tough to execute with a wound G and 25.5-inch scale length. Tune to open G, add a little more hair on the amp and it'll do a usable Keef tone, too.

Position 2/Mod B's blend of a Sitka spruce/mahogany dreadnought with a semi-clean electric is another useful voice in a band context, whether for the driving strummed chords of *Pinball Wizard*, the J-160E tones of the early Beatles, Tom Petty flavours or plenty more besides. Many classic records of the 1960s featured acoustic and electric rhythm tracks compressed into dense mono mixes – not to mention 12-strings, pickup-equipped acoustics plugged into valve amps and all manner of other instrumentation bathing in the warm halo of analogue tape. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised, then, that the Acoustasonic feels so well suited to playing the music of, and inspired by, that decade.

It's far from a retrograde design, of course. Position 3/Mod B adds the internal body sensor pickup into the mix with a Sitka spruce/Brazilian rosewood dreadnought voicing, facilitating modern percussive acoustic techniques. Although the body isn't deep, with some experimentation with the fleshy part of your fist, it's possible to elicit a kick-drum like thump to complement the rimshot sounds you can create by flicking the top with your fingernails. When playing more conventionally in this position, blending in a small amount of the body sensor to add depth and harmonic interest to the piezo sound also works well.

And even if you are no Jon Gomm, in conjunction with a looper pedal it's a really useful writing tool. Tap out a rhythm on the guitar's body, loop it up, layer some 'acoustic' chords and then flick the selector switch to the back pickup and jam over the top – as an inspirational one-stop platform for songwriting or exploring arrangement ideas, it's tough to beat.

The Acoustasonic will also cover a lot of ground in a function band and you might find that you can get away without bringing two amps to the gig. Less time spent loading out leaves more time to take advantage of the free buffet – always a bonus for the starving artist.

Although there are various ways to slice the acoustic/electric hybrid design and several other companies have brought very credible solutions to market, Fender's latest attempt is a serious contender. And when that F-brand is etched so artfully into the headstock, it's immediately a mainstream proposition.

The American Acoustasonic Telecaster works well with either acoustic or electric amplification and its small, shallow body offers very good resistance to feedback. Aside from fluid neck-pickup solo tones and heavy rock, it covers a surprisingly wide range of musical bases. If you're a new-generation acoustic soloist, a bedroom studio songwriter or a function-band rhythm guitarist looking for a do-it-all hybrid for live performance, this guitar should be right at the top of your must-try list.

9/10 **Problem-solving, tonally versatile and an inspiring songwriting companion**

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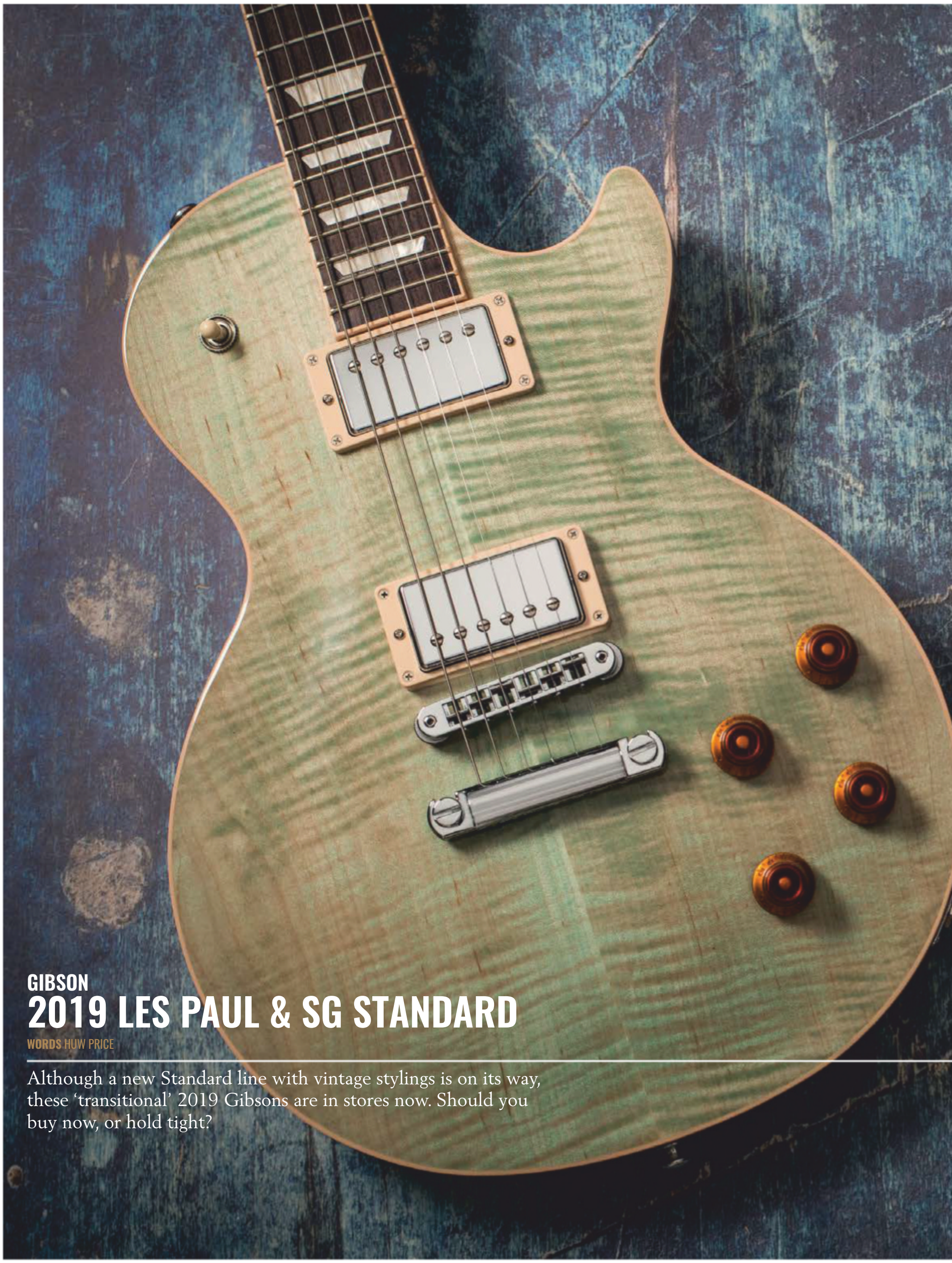


GIBSON
2019 LES PAUL & SG STANDARD

WORDS HUW PRICE

Although a new Standard line with vintage stylings is on its way, these ‘transitional’ 2019 Gibsons are in stores now. Should you buy now, or hold tight?

In recent years, Gibson's 'Standard' electric guitars have raised eyebrows worldwide – by being anything but. However, with JC Curleigh at the helm, the era of motorised tuners, zero frets and built-in effects seems to be over. Winter NAMM saw the company unveil an array of models harking back to simpler times, but what about the 2019 model year guitars launched back in September 2018? For the time being, you can still buy them, but our review guitars might not be around for long. Is it a case of grab 'em while you can? Let's find out…

There's little to distinguish the SG Standard from its mid-2000s incarnation. The only significant difference we notice is larger-than-usual strap buttons – a sensible choice on an instrument that can suffer from neck dive. It's nicely made, with a nitrocellulose finish that's thin enough to sink into the grain of the mahogany body and neck, and very neat fret nibs. The pearly acrylic inlays on the headstock and rosewood fingerboard are precisely done, although the 'board looks and feels a little drier and rougher than some. The mid-60s-style neck profile has sufficient bulk to get a good grip, but it's slimmer than a 50s profile. Squarer shoulders feel appropriate on this guitar. With no fancy switching options, you get a pair of straight-ahead humbuckers – a 490R in the neck and a 490T in the bridge. So far, so understated.

In marked contrast, seen here resplendent in a see-through Seafoam Green finish, the 2019 Les Paul Standard is an eyecatching devil. Beneath the figured maple cap, there's a one-piece mahogany body with Gibson's Ultra Modern weight relief. This is similar to Gibson's Modern pattern, but some of the internal recesses are cut a little larger. This results in a relatively lightweight Les Paul and player comfort is also thoughtfully tended to, thanks to an asymmetrical slim-taper neck profile and a compound-radius rosewood fingerboard. Again, the larger strap buttons help with the strapped-on stability.

Like the SG Standard, this guitar has an aluminium Nashville Tune-o-matic and stopbar tailpiece. Unlike the SG's regular Grover kidney-buttoned Rotomatic tuners, the Les Paul has locking Rotomatics with tulip-shaped buttons. The specs are high, although we're not fans of the dark amber control knobs and we hope that Gibson will eventually exhaust stocks of tangerine-tinted binding in time for the forthcoming 50s and 60s-spec Les Paul Standards.

Though the Les Paul looks straightforward from a wiring perspective, there's a lot more going on under the hood. Helpfully, there's a sticker with instructions for setting the HP-4 High Performance Circuit's five internal DIP switches on the control-cavity cover.

The first two DIP switches tap or split the two Burstbucker pickups and this function is tied to the CTS push/pull volume-control pots. Switches three and four take high pass filters out of circuit, while switch five activates 'transient suppression'. All three are set inside the cavity and can't be activated/deactivated externally.

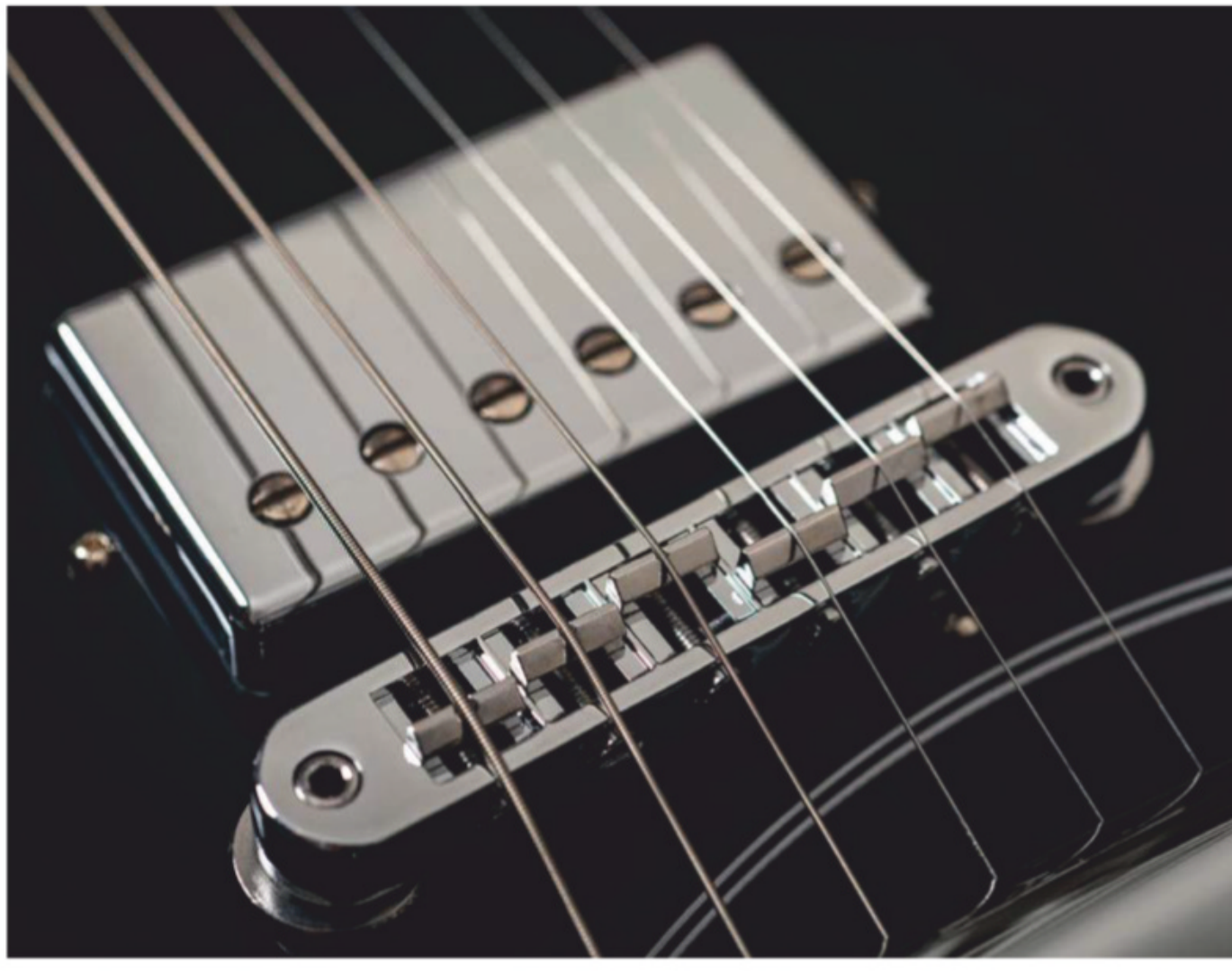
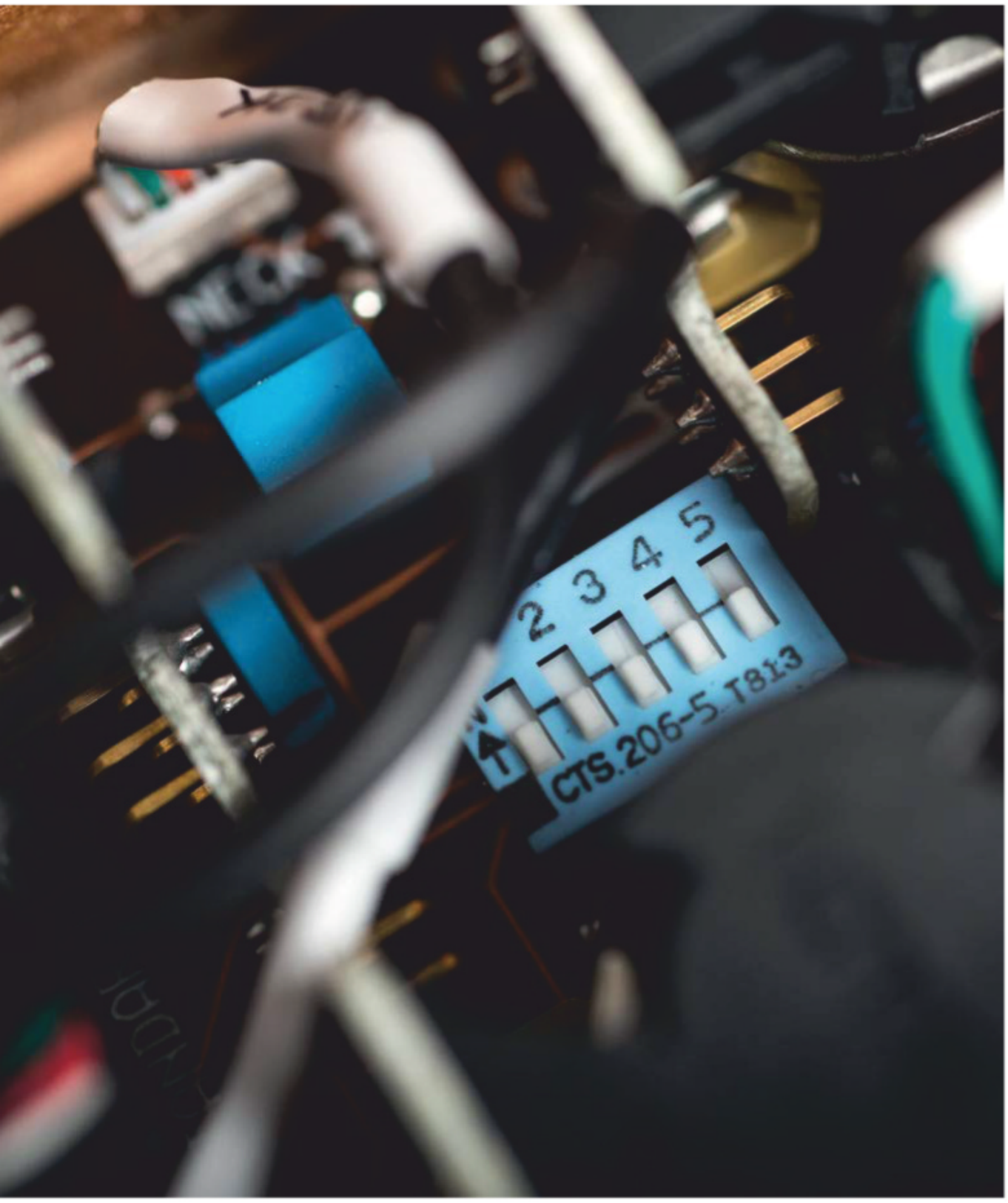
Both tone controls are also push/pull pots. Pulling up the neck tone control puts the combined pickups out of phase, while doing

so with the bridge tone control selects outer or inner coils when the pickups are split.

IN USE

The SG's lightness and easy action combine with natural sustain and harmonic richness in unplugged mode, yet when we plug in, it feels like the stock pickups inhibit those appealing acoustic properties. Despite some harshness, we're able to get closer to the thick and sustaining crunch tones we associate with SGs by adjusting pickup heights and polepieces and using different amps, but we can't get this SG to really sing.

The bridge ends up sounding pretty decent, especially for powerchords, but there's something slightly percussive and offputting about the neck setting that we can't quite remedy. That said, aside from the pickups, by keeping things simple, Gibson hasn't put a foot wrong with this SG. It's fun, well made, and better humbuckers would bring it to life.

Moving on to the Les Paul, this is a fine guitar of its type with a clear but meaty



sound, plenty of tonal range and a nice balance between the pickups. All the usual modern Les Paul Standard voices are there, from woody jazz to a hint of country quack, rich powerchords and sustaining solos. Plus, the switching options take us down roads less travelled…

Let's distinguish between tapping and splitting. Tapping takes the signal from a point earlier in the coil winding. Since fewer windings equate to lower output, it can make a hot pickup sound more akin to a vintage unit. That's the case here, as the tapped tones are less heavy in the bass and midrange, and a little more transparent and articulate.

Splitting a humbucker disengages one coil, effectively turning it into a single-coil pickup. We find this works best with very hot humbuckers, because each coil has sufficient windings to sound decent when the split is activated.

Since Burstbuckers only really occupy the hotter end of the vintage spectrum, the split setting here merely sounds like an underpowered single coil.

'High pass filters' appears to be Gibson's description of treble bleed capacitors. Activating the filters maintains treble response as the volume controls are turned down – we also detect a slightly higher output level. It's a cool feature and we'd choose to keep it engaged.

T-Bone Walker and Peter Green have helped ensure an out-of-phase middle setting is popular with many Gibson players and This Les Paul delivers that trademark honky hollowness. The transient-suppression function is supposed to be used for player-friendly dynamics when recording through a DI; through an amp, the guitar's response sounds very slightly subdued.

The best thing about push/pulls and DIP switches is that you can set and forget, or simply ignore them. The out-of-phase mode is a nice option and the taps produce decent tones, but we find the coil-split and transient-suppression features less appealing. However, this is a well made and nicely finished Les Paul that sounds excellent, even without all the extras.

KEY FEATURES

SG STANDARD
PRICE £1,199 (inc. gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD Mahogany body, set one-piece mahogany neck, bound rosewood fingerboard with acrylic pearl trapezoid markers and 22 low medium-jumbo cryogenically treated frets, Tektoid nut
HARDWARE Grover Rotomatic tuners with kidney buttons, aluminium Nashville Tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium stopbar
ELECTRICS 490R and 490T humbucking pickups, individual volume and tone controls, 3-way switch
SCALE LENGTH 625mm/24.6"
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 52.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 19mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.3mm at nut, 50.2mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.86kg/6.3lb
LEFT HANDERS Yes, no extra charge
FINISHES Ebony (as reviewed), Heritage Cherry

7/10 **A well-made and fine-playing SG, limited to powerchord rock by its pickups**

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MAYBACH ALBATROZ 65-2 **£1,614**, PRS MIRA **£1,199**, DUESENBERG BONNEVILLE **£1,322**

KEY FEATURES

LES PAUL STANDARD
PRICE £2,799 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD One-piece mahogany body with bookmatched figured-maple cap, set one-piece mahogany neck, bound rosewood fingerboard with acrylic pearl trapezoid markers and 22 low medium-jumbo cryogenically treated frets, Tektoid nut
HARDWARE Diecast locking Grover tuners, aluminium Nashville Tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece
SCALE LENGTH 625mm/24.6"
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 53.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 50.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.79kg/8.37lb
ELECTRICS 2x Burstbucker Pro humbucking pickups, 2x push/pull volume and 2x push/pull tone controls, 3-way switch, 5x internal DIP switches
LEFT-HANDERS Yes, no extra charge
FINISHES Seafoam Green nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Blueberry Burst
CONTACT Gibson
gibson.com

8/10 **The switching and finish may divide opinion, but this is a high-quality LP**

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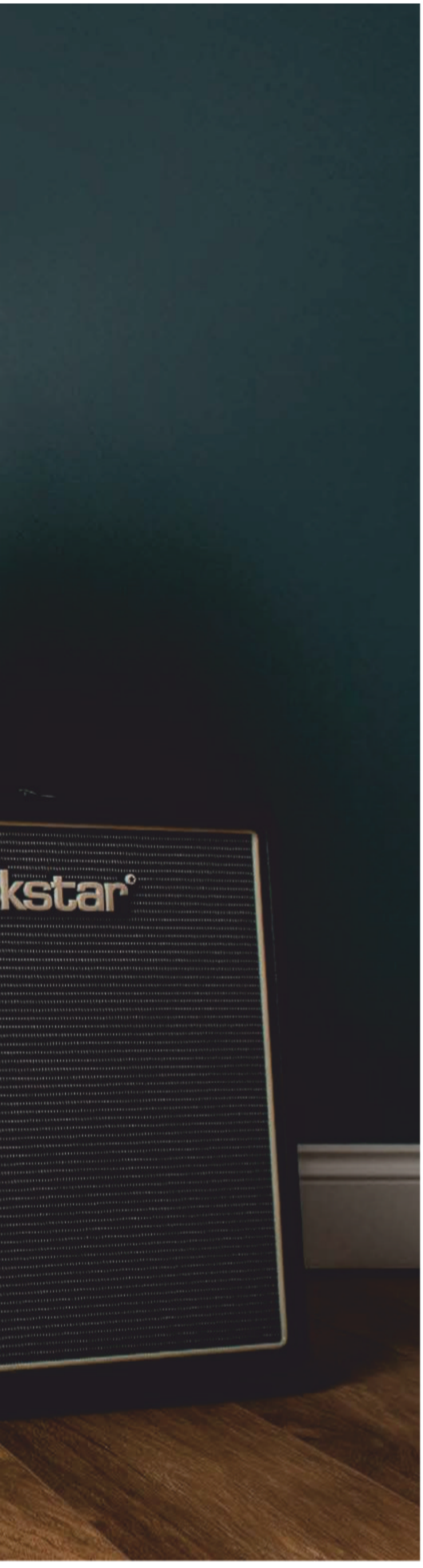

BLACKSTAR
STUDIO 10 EL34, KT88 & 6L6

WORDS RICHARD BARRETT

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

What difference does a power tube make? We put Blackstar's smart new trio of 10-watt valve combos to the test and set sail on a transatlantic tone cruise…

Since its debut in 2007 at Frankfurt Musikmesse, Blackstar Amplification has progressively expanded its range to offer everything from point-to-point-wired boutique-style heads and combos to high-gain stacks, lower wattage amps designed with recording in mind and a market-leading battery-powered amp. The latest range on offer is the Studio 10 – three combos with deceptively similar specs, but differentiated by each housing a different power valve, slight variations on the control panel and, of course, their distinctive looks.

Using small amps for recording is a very practical idea, as they can be driven hard at a far more sociable volume than your average 100-watt stack. This approach has a proven track record, with such titans as Clapton, Page and Gilmour all having recorded some enormous tones in precisely this way.

Blackstar clearly had this in mind when designing the new Studio 10 series. While they retain the purist 'one tone knob'-style approach of their forebears, these compact combos offer more up-to-date features and tonal flexibility, with different preamp tonestacks, a -10/+4 dB switchable effects loop, onboard digital reverb and a choice of power-valve flavour. There's also the bonus of a speaker-emulated headphone/recording output, for when it's not practical to mic the single 12-inch Celestion Seventy 80 speaker.

KEY FEATURES

STUDIO 10 EL34
PRICE £575
DESCRIPTION Single channel 1x12 valve amp with footswitchable gain boost, reverb, FX loop and emulated DI output. Made in China
POWER RATING 10 watts
VALVES 1x ECC83/12AX7, 1x EL34
CONTROL PANEL Gain, boost select, tone, reverb, master volume
REAR PANEL Speaker outs (1x 16 ohm/1x 8 ohm/2x 16 ohm), speaker emulated/headphone output, effects loop send and return (with -10/+4 level switch), FS-4S footswitch included, optional FS-8 for switching boost and reverb
SPEAKER 12" Celestion Seventy 80
DIMENSIONS 473 x 421 x 251mm
WEIGHT 14.9 kg/32.8lb

STUDIO 10 6L6
As above, except:
VALVES 1x ECC83/12AX7, 1x 6L6
WEIGHT 14.7kg/32.4lb

STUDIO 10 KT88
As above, except:
VALVES 1x ECC83/12AX7, 1x KT88
CONTROL PANEL Gain, boost select, ISF, reverb, master volume
WEIGHT 15.4 kg/33.9lb
CONTACT Blackstar Amplification
blackstaramps.com

At a glance, the most obvious variation between these three amps is the different-coloured vinyl and coordinating speaker cloth for each model. Investigating further, each amp has a similar control layout – but they're far from being three versions of the same ECC83/12AX7-driven preamp with EL34, 6L6, or KT88 output valves. Although even this alone would still make for an interesting comparison.

From left to right on the control plate, all have a single input jack and a gain control (which can be boosted via the small switch to its right, or the single remote footswitch provided). On the EL34 and 6L6 version, we find a single tone control, followed by reverb and master volume. The red jewel-light power indicator and metal standby and power switches complete the line-up.

Looking over the KT88 version, we find an almost identical array, but for the inclusion of an ISF control in place of the tone knob. This is a unique feature on many Blackstar products, enabling you to shift from a more 'American' 6L6-style midrange character at zero, to a more EL34-inspired high-mid-focused 'British' character at 10, with all points between available, depending on your needs and taste.

IN USE

Plugging into the EL34 version and setting up a clean tone, we're rewarded with the sweet midrange, controlled bass and clear but balanced highs these valves are known for. In non-boosted mode, the single ECC83 preamp starts breaking up gently at around one o'clock on the gain control, delivering more of a crunch the further clockwise we go. With the boost engaged, this process starts earlier on the dial and at maximum, will give you enough gain for driven blues or classic rock. The drive character has a midrange focus reminiscent of some of the more popular vintage overdrive pedals and a hint of the clean tone seems to remain present, even with the tone set low and drive boosted to maximum. This does make for great clarity and is particularly suited to single coils or brighter guitars. If you want to

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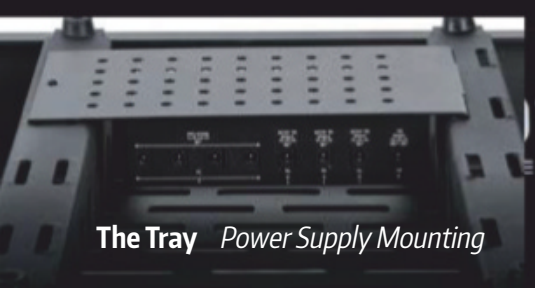

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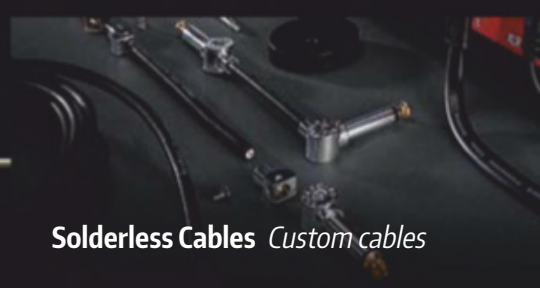
Power LT XL *Power Station*



Solderless Cables *Custom cables*

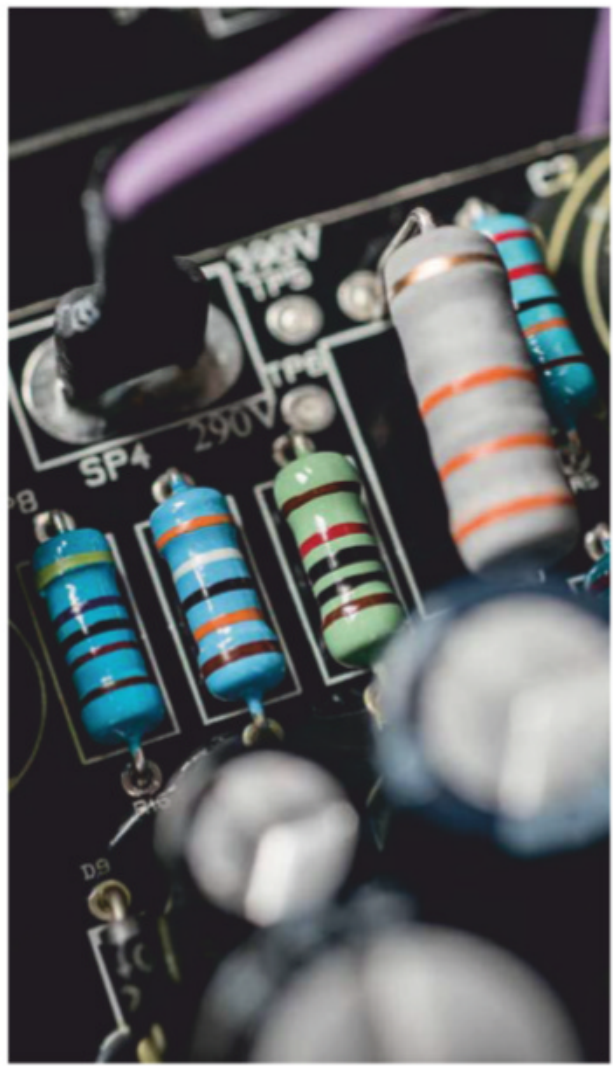
fight this amp's inherent character and get brutal, you'll need to add a drive pedal.

Firing up the 6L6 model, the soundstage seems much bigger, with the wide frequency range and slightly recessed mids we expect to hear from this kind of valve. Increasing the drive adds a pleasing crunch, enhanced by the boost – which is inspired by Blackstar's own HT-Drive pedal here. There's a pleasing low-mid 'thud' and even with single coils, there's enough drive for a fat, sustaining lead tone. The best results come from running the tone control just below halfway, though the extra brightness further up comes in very handy for clean tones and higher-powered humbuckers.

The immediate impression from the KT88 model is akin to a combination of both the EL34 and 6L6, with an extended frequency range, focused bass response and slightly fuller 'British' midrange. KT88s are known for being robust, with high headroom, and this amp is no exception. Cleans are excellent, and the ISF control is a simple but very effective way to change the character of the sound. Adding extra gain takes you through various very usable degrees of crunch, and switching in the boost adds plenty of gain, staying well defined to the upper reaches of the dial. Edging the ISF further clockwise for lead sounds smooths out occasional high-frequency peaks.

The digital reverb works beautifully and the partial open-back design delivers a wide spread of sound. However, there are also options for connecting alternative speaker cabs for a fuller low end; the speaker emulated out works well enough, too. Overall, each of these three little amps has a very distinctive character, and each delivers sounds the others can't.

9/10 **Well designed, ruggedly built amps with a choice of basic voicing to suit everyone**



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PRS 513 Rosewood - McCarty Tobaccoburst - used/2007 ..... £3,290
Fender USA Roadhouse Strat - sunburst - used/1997 ..... £849
Gibson ES339 Studio - gingerburst - used/2016 ..... £899
Rickenbacker 330 - mapleglo - used/1988 ..... £1,339
Gibson Historic Collection R9 Les Paul - used/2005 ..... £3,579
Fender Jaguar Reissue - made in Japan - 1966 ..... £945
Fender USA Lonstar Strat - sunburst - used/1996 ..... £959
Fender Jason Smith Masterbuilt `68' Paisley Strat - used/2014 ..... £4,289
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Fender Chris Shiflett Tele Deluxe - artic white - used/2012 ..... £629
Fender AM Deluxe Strat HSS - teal green - used/2002 ..... £990
Fender USA Strat Plus Deluxe - used/1989 - sunburst £1,239
Fender James Burton Signature Tele - Red Paisley Flame - 2015 ..... £1,379
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Gretsch G6128T Duo Jet - cadillac green - used/2015 ..... £1,790
Gibson Les Paul Custom - wine red - used/1976 ..... £3,099
Gibson Les Paul Deluxe - cherry sunburst - used/1981 ..... £2,190
PRS Custom 22 Artist Pack - 2005/20th anniversary - blue matteo £2,349
Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat - Lake placid blue £2,995
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CORNELL AMPS
TRAVELLER 5

WORDS HUW PRICE

Denis Cornell has built valve amps for the likes of Eric Clapton, Noel Gallagher and Wilko Johnson, and the Traveller 5 is a low-wattage offering from Southend On Sea's finest…

There is something of the 'age of steam' about Cornell amps. It's possibly the logo because, to our eyes, it looks like something that would have graced the tank of a long-scrapped locomotive. The Traveller 5 moniker could also be contributing to this overall impression, too – but that clearly has more to do with this amp's raison d'être than public transport. Although it's described as a 'bedroom style' handwired amp, its portability and variable power settings are designed for flexibility in a variety of low-wattage scenarios.

The Traveller 5 delivers up to a bracing five watts through an 8-inch Celestion G8C-15 speaker. But if that proves too hot to handle, a four-way switch on the control panel provides three attenuated settings – 1.5, 0.25 and 0.05 watts. Attenuation is achieved through resistive loading.

Given the maximum power rating, the presence of a low input to accompany the high level input may come as a surprise. But if you use high-output pickups or intend to use the Traveller 5 as a low-volume pedal platform, it all makes perfect sense.

Most low-power guitar amps tend to be short on features, but this isn't the case with the Traveller 5. Here, we have a Clean/Mean switch to adjust clean headroom, along with a gain control and a master volume. With just a single tone control, there's not much scope for frequency-response sculpting, but the easy-to-access 8-ohm external speaker socket on the control panel makes it easy to audition a variety of cabinets.

The basket-weave speaker cloth and wide framing of the robust plywood cabinet make the Traveller 5 look not dissimilar to a scaled down mid-1960s Marshall combo. Everything feels very solid and the finish quality impresses. A more stylish handle and cooler control knobs might give the amp more of a boutique vibe, even if the pricing is firmly in the 'affordable' camp.

Although the back panel covers almost the entire rear surface area, there's a sizeable cutout with a perforated metal grille to protect the valves. In this instance, that's a 12AX7/ECC83 and an EL84 operating in single-ended mode. There's also a corner cutout, which provides a convenient storage solution for the mains cable. This means that it just about qualifies as an open-back cabinet.

The build quality is equally impressive inside. All the components are mounted onto

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £499
DESCRIPTION Single-channel single-ended valve combo with onboard attenuation. Built in the UK
POWER RATING 5/1.5/0.25/0.05 watts
VALVES 1x 12AX7, 1x EL84
CONTROL PANEL Hi/low inputs, clean/mean, gain, tone, volume, external speaker out, output power
REAR PANEL N/A
SPEAKER 1x 8" Celestion G8C-15
DIMENSIONS 433 x 375 x 85mm
WEIGHT 9.9kg/21.8lb
CONTACT Cornell Custom Amplification
cornellamps.com

an eyelet board that's made from an epoxy-bonded fibreglass that will never absorb moisture. Clearly, Denis Cornell knows a thing or two about component layouts and everything appears to be arranged to keep signal-path length as short as possible.

IN USE

The high input is both louder and brighter than the low input, so for general playing duties, we find it the best-sounding and most useful. Beginning in clean mode with the volume control maxed out, a regular Stratocaster pushes the Traveller 5 into overdrive once the gain control reaches about 11 o'clock.

The overdrive first manifests as a growl in the low mids and then progresses upwards in the frequency range to fatten the mids, at the cost of some treble sparkle. It's a pleasingly rough-edged tone that holds together nicely until the gain control reaches around 3 o'clock, but beyond that, things get a touch fizzy and grainy.

This improves when the volume control is backed off and we quickly discover that the overdrive texture and amount of compression can be altered by balancing the volume and gain controls. Of course, you can exert even more control using the attenuation switch, but we notice that there's an increase in distortion with the attenuation engaged.

Switching to Mean mode, we hear a fatter midrange and as expected, breakup occurs much earlier. It's a raunchier tone, with a more British bark and there's a fair amount of saturation if you need it. Things start to go a bit awry at very high gain settings, but

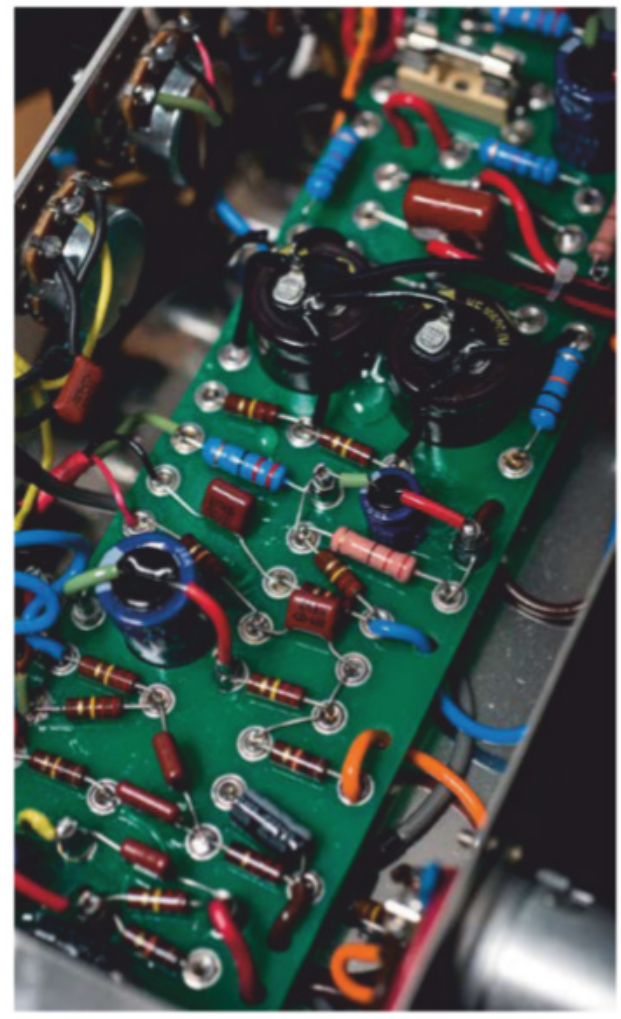
once again, the problem is too much volume rather than too much gain. As before, we notice extra distortion when attenuation is applied – and not of the toneful variety.

Because plugging into an external speaker disengages the internal speaker, we are able to gauge how the default Celestion G8C-15 affects the Traveller 5's tone. Although it has all been fairly positive up to now, hearing the Traveller 5 through a physically larger speaker really lifts the proverbial lid. In short, it turns out that this is a much better amp than we hitherto thought.

Throughout the tests, we've been slightly frustrated by a low-mid boxiness and lack of treble sparkle. There's actually nothing wrong with this circuit, because the missing frequencies have been there all along, it's just that you can't really hear them through the stock speaker. It actually sounds pretty wonderful through a Celestion Blue, especially in Clean mode. The Clean/Mean switch's influence on the midrange becomes more apparent in a UK/US sort of way, and without the G8C-15's boxy colouration, the effectiveness of the tone control becomes more apparent.

Our only reservation about the Traveller 5 is Cornell's choice of speaker. Given the amount of space inside the cabinet, we feel an onboard 10-inch speaker would help this amp to realise its full potential, and we'd be interested to see it in head form as well as a combo. Having said that, in its current format, studio-quality tones are certainly available and it's a fantastic practice and jamming-at-home amp. But with a handful of minor upgrades, it could be so much better. **G**

7/10 **A well-made, great-sounding amp, but the onboard speaker hides its true character**



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ORANGE
PEDAL BABY 100

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

A solid-state, Class A/B slice of power with 100 real watts of citrus-sucking sunshine, designed specifically for the pedal-loving guitarist…

Life as a gigging guitarist often features elements of uncertainty and randomness – sometimes the only thing we can rely on is our sound. In an attempt to maintain this precious tonal consistency, many of us have painstakingly dialled in our pedalboard settings, only to suffer the indignity of having that same gorgeous, pedal-driven tone rendered unrecognisable by sterile-sounding backline.

Orange designer Ade Emsley's answer is the Pedal Baby 100, a single-ended solid-state head, featuring a Class A preamp and Class A/B power-amp configuration, great portability and reliable build quality.

The Pedal Baby 100 is simplicity itself to set up, the only controls being the on/off switch, a master volume, bass and treble knobs. All three knobs feel smooth and sturdy. This stripped-back approach is reassuring and reinforces the concept of the amp being as user-friendly as possible. There are two output jacks on the back for your speaker cables (never guitar leads!) and a voltage switch, which is covered with a clear plastic safety guard. This is a lightweight, good-looking head with the silk-screened Orange logo on the top adding zest.

IN USE

Orange claims that with the Pedal Baby 100 set on 8 ohms, you can squeeze out an impressive 100 real watts of power, so grabbing our latest pedalboard iteration and some ear defenders, we drive to a local rehearsal studio to unleash the beast.

We're confronted with the Pedal Baby 100's primary raison d'etre – a beauty-pageant selection of unfamiliar cabs. Plugging in to an angled Marshall 4x12, we set the EQ knobs to 12 o'clock and gently roll the volume up from zero, as the manual suggests. Set completely clean like this, we're rewarded with a warm, dynamic response which sounds beautiful for jazz and makes us wish we'd brought a guitar with flatwound strings.

As we engage our pedalboard, things start to get lively. The sounds produced are full and musical and – importantly – feel and sound familiar and 'right'. The next half hour involves hitting the Pedal Baby 100 with everything from evil stuttering fuzzes to high gain walls of distortion via a selection of phase and ring modulator pedals that can be relied upon to push any amp to its limits. The Pedal Baby 100 handles everything with poise and, when the occasion demands, trouser-flapping volume.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £299
DESCRIPTION Single-ended 100W solid-state, Class A/B compact head. Made in China
POWER RATING 100W at 8 ohms
VALVES N/A
CONTROL PANEL Bass, treble, volume, on/off switch
REAR PANEL 2x speaker outs
SPEAKER N/A
DIMENSIONS 300mm x 77mm x 195mm
WEIGHT 3.2kg/7.05lbs
CONTACT OMEC orangeamps.com

The Pedal Baby 100 will find most favour with stompbox-loving gigging guitarists looking to shift air; and a chat with London session player, Mike Mayfield, confirms a niche for it in use with profiling amps such as the Kemper, too. This is an impressive piece of kit and may prove as much of a gamechanger as the Tiny Terror before it.

9/10 **A compact, user-friendly slab of tonal reassurance for the pedal-happy guitarist**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

DV MARK LITTLE 250 M **£329**, YAMAHA THR100H **£509**, BOSS KATANA-HEAD **£314**

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

SOVTEK DELUXE BIG MUFF PI & GRAND CANYON

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

We like Electro-Harmonix pedals best when they're a bit extreme… so how about a furious filth-generator with radical tone-sculpting options and a digital delay with 16-minute looping?

Some of us are old and deaf enough to remember when Electro-Harmonix was an underdog, known for its crazy-haired boss and small range of quirky pedals. Although Mike Matthews grows ever more hirsute, you'd be pushing it to call today's EHX operation an indie. This underdog is threatening to take over the yard.

EHX has embraced digital processing, while continuing to expand on its unique analogue heritage, and the result is a product list that now takes half a day to scroll through. Here are two of the latest additions: a multi-mode digital delay and looper, and yet another variant on the legendary Big Muff Pi.

Muff culture is a world unto itself, going back to 1969 and almost 20 different versions in the current range. This one is based on the Russian-made 'Civil War' Big Muff of the early 90s, so nicknamed because of its blue/grey colour scheme. Mind you, this isn't the grey of a Confederate soldier's uniform – more like the beige-y hue of the corridors in a Moscow tower block.

While the Civil War model predates the more famous green Russian Muffs, it's known for the same sound: less sweet and more snarly than its American cousins. As you can probably tell by all the extra knobs, though, this is no mere reissue. It's a Russian-voiced equivalent to the black Deluxe Big Muff Pi, with the same footswitchable mids circuit, only the boost option here is for treble instead of bass and the attack control is replaced by a simple bypass-blending dial.

The story behind the Grand Canyon is more straightforward. Well, when you already have a pedal called the Canyon, how many meetings does it take to come up with a name for a slightly bigger version? It remains a digital delay with various modes to flip between, including a looper, and up to three seconds of delay; but while this is still a small unit, EHX has crammed in a preposterous amount of functionality.

Most crucially, you can record loops with delay applied rather than having to select one or the other. You also get stereo outputs with a ping-pong option and a couple of extra delay models (drum and doubler),

while increased parameter control means ‘octave’ now becomes a more flexible ‘pitch’ mode. Plus the maximum loop time goes up from 62 seconds to a frightening 16 minutes.

IN USE

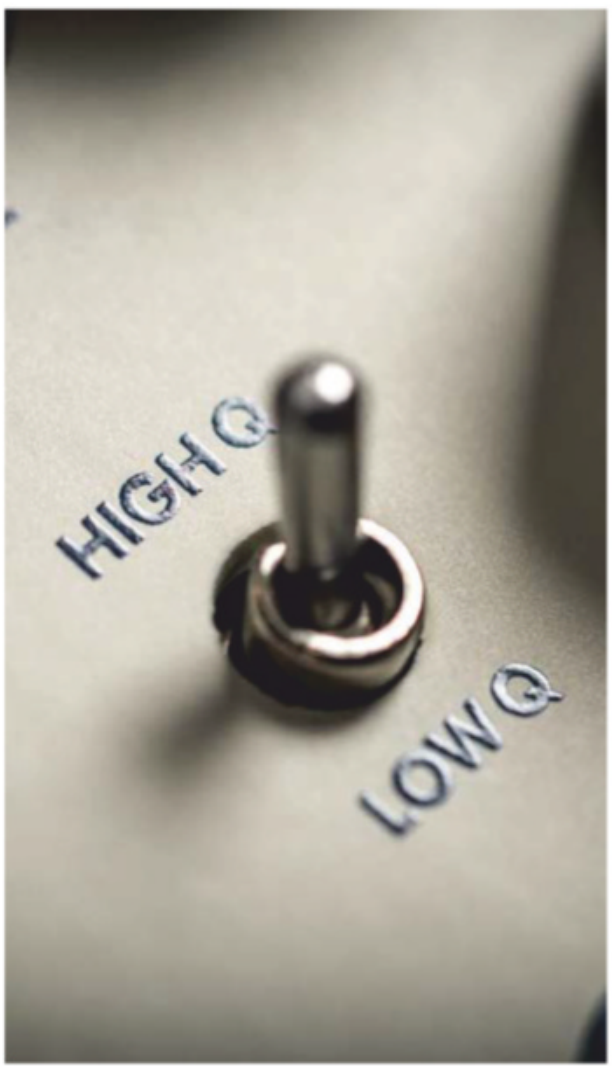
Has anyone ever used a Muff with the sustain control set below 10 o’clock? It feels like driving a Jaguar up the M1 in third gear… and you’ll forgive us if we don’t stay in the slow lane very long, because this really is a roaring beast of a stompbox. No matter how many variants there may be, we always expect the same core quality from any pedal bearing that pi symbol: ultra-smooth, ultra-rich distortion on an absolutely massive scale. And the Sovtek Deluxe Big Muff Pi delivers.

The difference in tonality between this and a standard silver Muff is quite stark. After the the syrupy boop-boop of the ‘classic’ pedal, the Sovtek’s Russian accent barks out with a whole lot more grind. Yet while it’s more aggressive, it’s no less addictively easy on the ear – and that remains the case when we start messing with those extra controls.

‘Wicker’ adds biting treble that’s almost always welcome with humbuckers; ‘blend’ brings back some clean tone that’s almost never welcome unless you’re playing bass; and the gate is easily set just above the background noise level to tame the maelstrom between sonic blasts, as well as adding extra definition to staccato playing.

Stomp on the mids switch and the controls on the right will now let you cut or boost pretty much any midrange frequencies you fancy. Here’s where an expression pedal comes in spectacularly handy: with mids boosted, you’ve effectively got a fuzzy wah with adjustable voicing; with mids cut, the effect is more phaser-like and arguably even cooler. Cleverly, plugging in an expression pedal doesn’t take the mids frequency control right out of the circuit – it now sets the upper limit of the sweep, which is hugely useful.

After a quick break to let the tinnitus subside, we turn to the Grand Canyon. With



its 12 delay modes plus looper, each with its own parameters adjusted by the two mini knobs at top-right, this is one complex little unit. Getting started is easy enough, though: use the big black knob to flip between modes and the white dials on the left for control of the basics.

The quality of these delays is just as good as we've come to expect in 2019. 'Tape' does the wobbly thing in fine style, 'reverse' makes a decent stab at responding to your playing to avoid glitchy cutoffs and 'DMM' sounds a lot like a real Deluxe Memory Man, but without the scratchy noises. The Echorec-inspired multi-head drum setting is a worthy addition, while the pitch and shimmer modes are suitably ethereal, especially in stereo.

Setting up a new loop is also simple, and it's nice to know you're pretty much never going to run out of recording time. But it's round about now that we realise we've drifted into the more complex capabilities of this device: editable presets, programmable expression-pedal settings, multi-function buttons and footswitches and a 'hidden' secondary mode that only applies to the pitch and drum delays.

It's impressive that EHX's designers have managed to squeeze so many features into such a pedalboard-friendly enclosure; but the multi-function controls can get confusing, the knobs and buttons are tiny and cramped, and the text on the right-hand panel can only be read by wasps. It's a fun-packed pedal alright, but maybe a larger format and even an LCD screen would have made this Canyon easier to cross.

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

SOVTEK DELUXE BIG MUFF PI
PRICE £144
DESCRIPTION Distortion/fuzz pedal. Assembled in USA
CONTROLS Volume, blend, tone, sustain, gate level, mids level, mids frequency; wicker (top boost) and high/low/mids Q switches; mids footswitch, bypass footswitch; internal trimpots for high Q bandwidth, high Q level and overall mids level
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery (included) or mains supply
DIMENSIONS 149 x 119 x 55mm

9/10 **A timelessly gorgeous-sounding Muff with astounding tonal versatility**

KEY FEATURES

GRAND CANYON
PRICE £230
DESCRIPTION Digital multi-mode delay and looper pedal. Assembled in USA
CONTROLS Delay level, feedback and delay (dry cut, dub level and fadeout time in looper mode), loop level; expression mode, momentary switching, tails and ping-pong buttons; tap tempo division and delay/looper/both mode buttons; 12-way delay type control (press for preset mode) with two type-specific control knobs; tap/loop and bypass footswitches
FEATURES Mono and stereo outputs, expression pedal and remote footswitch inputs; switchable buffered or DSP bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (included)
DIMENSIONS 119 x 100 x 60mm
CONTACT Electro-Harmonix
ehx.com

8/10 **A fine delay that's packed with clever tricks... but it isn't half fiddly**

LIKE THESE? TRY THESE...

SOVTEK DELUXE BIG MUFF PI
THORPYFX FALLOUT CLOUD **£185**, JHS PEDALS MUFFULETTA **£219**, OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVORS ALPHA HAUNT **£219**

GRAND CANYON
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EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

SWISS THINGS PEDALBOARD RECONCILER

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Akron, Ohio's finest purveyors of boutique effects wonder release a compact, pedalboard-friendly junction box to bring order where once there was chaos. Will you choose the path of least resistance?

Founded in 2004 in Ohio, USA, EarthQuaker Devices has achieved a worldwide reputation for handbuilt, boutique quality across an extensive line of pedals. These range from revamps of classic circuits with a twist, such as the Palisades, to those that unleash inspired mayhem, such as the Rainbow Machine. The Swiss Things aims to consign unnecessarily complex pedalboard wiring to history, while adding some additional touches to bring out the best in existing setups.

Based around the twin concepts of an A/B box and a dual loop switcher, the Swiss Things immediately feels sturdy and well made, with clear labelling throughout. The switches all function perfectly and the LEDs are bright enough to be seen easily, even in daylit stage conditions.

In addition to Swiss Things' core architecture, EarthQuaker Devices has also added a 20dB boost, a tuner out and expression-pedal volume-control functionality (which, when used like this, won't affect your gain). The pedal also features 'Flexi-Switching', allowing each loop to be engaged by either a momentary or latching action on the footswitch.

Loop 1 of the Swiss Things is unbuffered – and this is where EarthQuaker Devices suggests you park your distortion, fuzz and overdrive pedals, with the buffer on loop 2 making it the ideal choice for temporal and modulation effects.

When it comes to the pair of outputs, there is a joyful isolation transformer on output B to eliminate ground-loop issues when using a dual-amp setup, and a phase-polarity reversal switch, too. Unlike other pedal looping systems we have seen for a small-to-medium board setup, there is nothing on the Swiss Things that feels unnecessary, or like an afterthought.

IN USE

While a switching pedal may be unlikely to get the pulse racing, the creative possibilities it affords the player certainly should. Aside from eliminating the need to Fred Astaire one's way from one end of the pedalboard to the other when changing effects, it also allows for the inclusion of equipment that might prove impractical to use otherwise.

KEY FEATURES

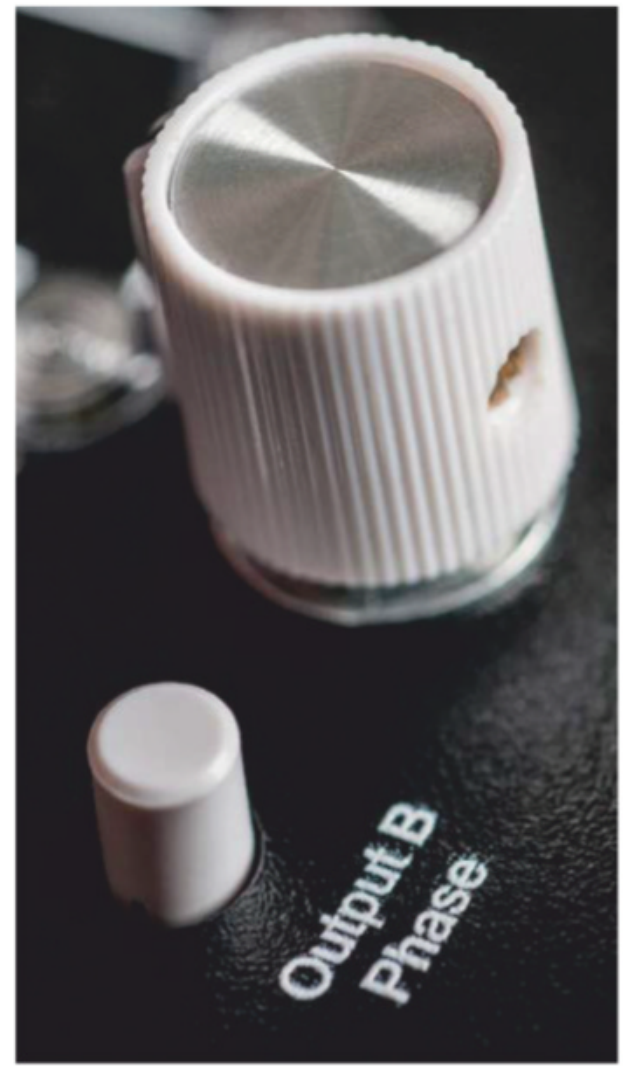
PRICE £249
DESCRIPTION Hand-wired A/B box/loop switcher. Made in the USA
CONTROLS Loop 1, loop 2, boost, both, A/B footswitches, boost knob
FEATURES Twin effects loops, twin outputs, 20dB boost, volume expression pedal and tuner-out functionality. Flexi-switching momentary/latching switches
DIMENSIONS 143.5 x 120.6 x 57.1mm
CONTACT EarthQuaker Devices
earthquakerdevices.com audiodistributiongroup.com

Cracking open our quarantine box of lesser used, badly behaved but sonically glorious pedals, we assemble a pedal chain not dissimilar to that used by producer Mick Gordon for his groundbreaking soundtrack work.

Bizarre self-oscillating delays, vintage tremolos with an accompanying crackle like frying bacon, angry pitch-shifters etc, can all be isolated from polite society until it's their time to shine with a tap of the momentary switch. The same is true when it comes to blending different guitar amplifers: traditionally a potentially tricky process, but one rendered refreshingly seamless in this case. Huge ambient soundscapes, psychedelic bliss-outs and cascading gain stages can all be created at the touch of a switch, too… It's really quite intoxicating.

Clearly a lot of love and thought has gone into the creation of the Swiss Things and its potential as a music-making tool is limited only by the imagination and equipment of the user. With the potential to allow for creative and musical decisions on the fly, both onstage and in the studio, EarthQuaker Devices' Swiss Things really can unlock the potential in a lovingly assembled pedalboard and/or amp collection.

9/10 **A great switcher that could transform how you approach your board and amps**



LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

CARL MARTIN OCTA-SWITCH MK3 **£299**, CHAMAELEO TAIL LOOP MK II **£252**, THE GIGRIG QUARTERMASTER QMX-8 PEDAL SWITCHER **£239**

RITUAL TUBE AUDIO
RITUAL TUBE DI

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

With re-amping in vogue and a plethora of DAW amplifier plug-ins to enjoy, a quality DI box is becoming a must for guitar-and-bass recording

Evolving studio techniques have made DI recording relevant again. Pure instrument signals can be captured and later processed through digital amp and speaker plug-ins, or routed back out to real amplifiers and re-recorded with mics. Even if you're recording an instrument through an amp, splitting the signal allows you to keep the performance, but change the sound later.

You'll want your DI recording to be as pristine as possible and that's what the Ritual Tube DI is all about. It's built like a boutique amplifier, with silver mica and Mallory 150 signal capacitors hand-wired onto turret board, and a top-spec Jensen transformer balancing the output.

IN USE

We plug in a Telecaster and connect the Ritual to a Universal Audio Apollo 8 line input. The Ritual's link output goes through the Apollo 8's DI input to make simultaneous recordings.

Although the Apollo's DI impresses, the Ritual sounds clearer, with more harmonic sparkle and bass definition. With a bass, the Ritual is warmer, chewier and simply more fun to play. Higher-output pickups can push the valve to generate a hint of tube warmth and with attenuation at 0dB, the volume control keeps output levels in check; or you can attenuate the input and turn up the volume to keep things clean. We also find the 'bright' switch targets a guitar's sparkle frequencies and helps basses to cut through.

This top-quality studio DI box's bulletproof metal chassis makes it a roadworthy tool for bassists and acoustic guitarists alike. For stage and studio work, it's hard to fault. G

9/10 **A stylish, beautifully made, rock-solid and fabulous-sounding piece of kit**

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £749
DESCRIPTION Hand-wired valve DI box in portable stainless-steel enclosure, leather handle, Jensen output transformer. Made in the UK
FRONT PANEL Jack input with thru output, tube-buffered jack output, balanced XLR output, mute with LED indicator, 0/-6/-12dB input pad selector, balanced-output level adjust, ground lift, phase reverse, pull 'bright' switch
REAR PANEL Power switch, jewel light
DIMENSIONS 330 x 130 x 103mm
WEIGHT 2.46kg/5.42lb
CONTACT Ritual Tube Audio
ritualtubeaudio.co.uk

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SLINKYS FOR DAYS

TUL MICROPHONES
G12 RETRO

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

Retro looks can be deceiving – we audition a convention-challenging modern microphone that's been uniquely designed to capture your amplifier's roar in all its natural glory

Despite the modern-day abundance of digital devices/speaker simulators/load-box attenuators on the market, placing a high-quality microphone in front of your amplifier is still the favoured professional route for capturing an amplifier's tone – and, we dare say, this may always be the case.

But which microphone of the many types and models on the market these days should you choose? Should you opt for the tried-and-trusted, reliable dynamic mic? Or instead opt for in an expensive ribbon model, in an attempt to capture that elusive vintage tone? Maybe you should consider using a condenser mic instead, to capture both detail and dynamics? If you think that engaging a guitarist in a debate on overdrive pedals is a surefire way to lose an afternoon in the pub, then ask a studio engineer to discuss the virtues of various microphones! Prepare to lose the rest of your weekend…

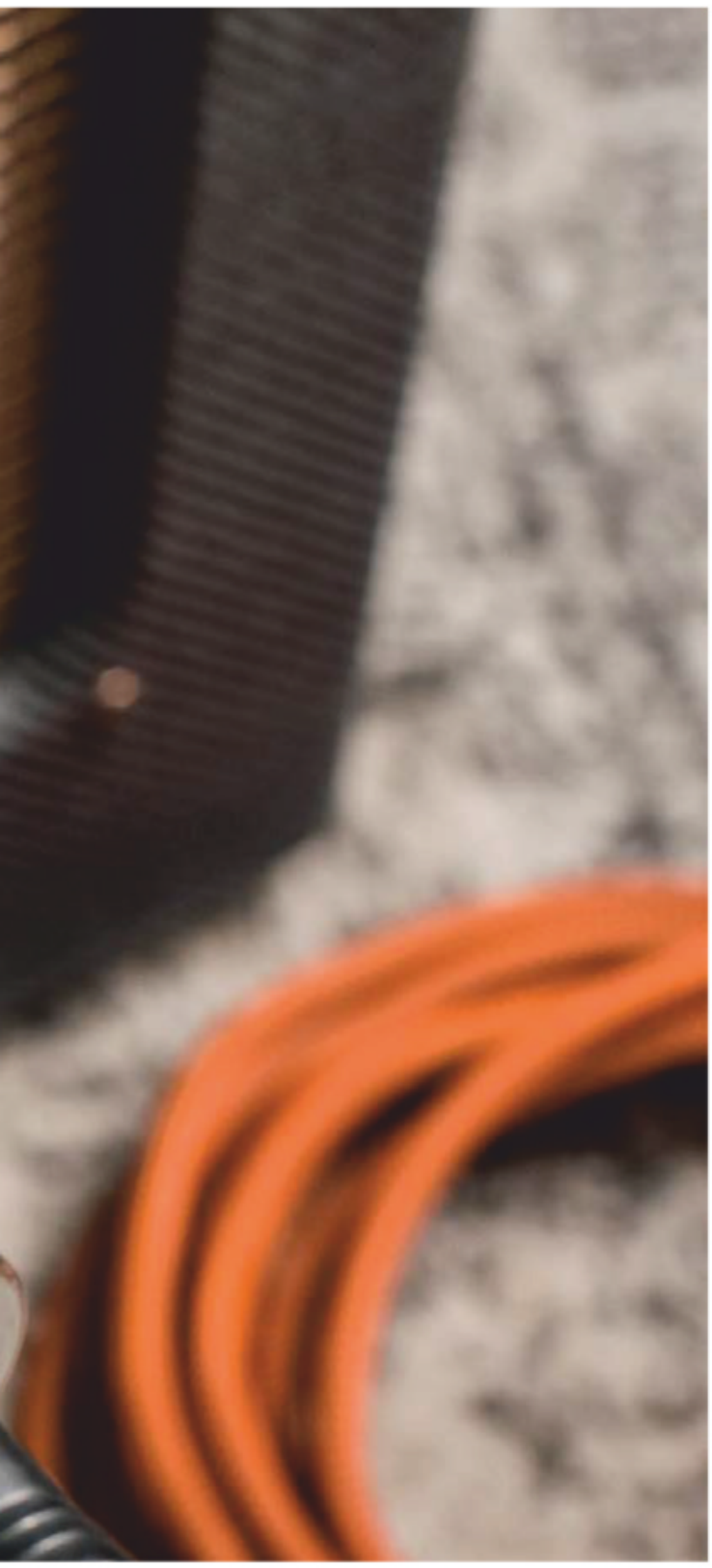
Of course, in reality, experienced sound engineers will often employ a combination of different microphone types to fully capture an amp's sound, blending their contrasting characteristics to achieve the desired tonality. This complex, skilled approach can leave us mere mortals confused about issues such as phase, EQ, axis, distance, even phantom power.

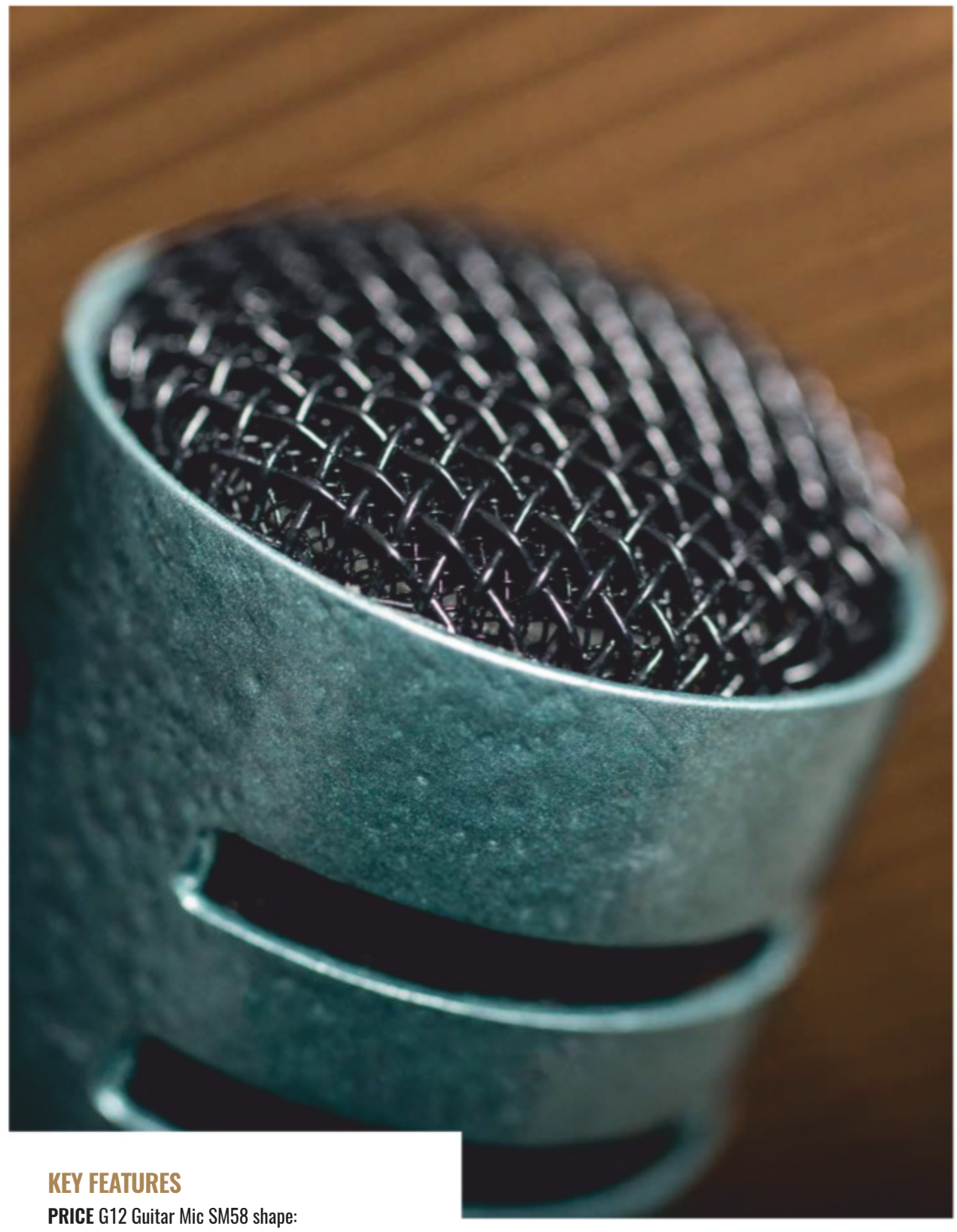
IN USE

Studio musician and engineer Tully McCullagh of Cape Town's Tul Microphones answered the request of some big-name engineers – including Kevin Shirley (Iron Maiden, Joe Bonamassa) – to simplify this approach. He set about creating a single microphone to provide the combined tone of three of the most common high-end microphones, without the associated headaches and expense.

Housed in a beautiful bespoke retro metal enclosure, looking like something you might stumble across in a cupboard at Abbey Road Studios, the G12 Retro is a dynamic mic specifically tuned to capture the natural sound of a guitar amp that's equally at home in both recording and live environments.

Uniquely, Tul Microphones insists that the G12 is positioned on-axis, dead-centre, a few inches from the amp's speaker cone. While this approach is counterintuitive to standard microphone technique, the G12's patent-pending internal filtering eliminates the high-frequency buzzy tonal artifacts





that are often negatively associated with this method.

Requiring little, if any, post equalisation or compression, the G12 gloriously captures your signal with such an extraordinary airy quality, detail and subtle nuance, we find ourselves searching for a hidden internal valve or ribbon and double-checking the asking price.

With a silky-smooth top end that's present but never harsh, a solid low-end punch and all the complex midrange detail you'd expect from a great dynamic microphone, guitar tones glisten through a busy live-band mix – even though a rather road-worn PA system. The onboard bright switch gives a useful subtle 5K boost, although we found the natural tone of the microphone so good we never felt the need to engage it.

Having heard one in action, it comes as no surprise that many producers/engineers and pro players such as Joe Bonamassa are relying on these microphones to capture their highly crafted amp tones, both in the studio and live environments.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE G12 Guitar Mic SM58 shape: $289 (approx. £225)
G12 Guitar Mic Retro (as reviewed): $329 (approx. £255)
DESCRIPTION Dynamic guitar-amplifier microphone
CONTROLS Bright switch
FEATURES Retro design, bright switch, clip and soft case included
DIMENSIONS (length x diameter x circumference) 180 x 37 x 120mm
CONTACT Tul Microphones tulmicrophones.com

While more expensive than some of its potential rivals, we believe the Tul G12 Retro is actually something of a bargain. Combining the desired sonic qualities of a range of complex and expensive studio microphones into a single, classily retro-looking unit that's still rugged enough for live use, Tul has achieved a masterstroke of original design.

10/10 **An ingenious pro-quality dynamic mic that's versatile and great value to boot**

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DO IT YOURSELF

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SOLDERING FOR GUITAR PLAYERS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Knowing how to solder opens up a world of money-saving DIY fun, but there's an art to doing it well. In this feature, you'll learn everything you need to know in order to solder properly – and we'll be putting it to practical use by showing you how to make your own guitar cable…

RIGHT This leaded solder has a 60/40 tin-and-lead ratio, with a rosin flux core and a 0.7mm outer diameter

BELOW This tip is a few years old and has done a lot of work, but it's in relatively good shape and still performing well

FAR RIGHT The twisted wires must be tinned and after heating the wires for a few seconds, the solder flows in to fuse everything together

We cover a lot of amplifier and guitar electronics projects in our DIY features. Perhaps we take it for granted that everybody knows how to solder – but even those of us who have been soldering for decades may be able to learn something new. This feature is divided into two parts. In the first part, I'll be sharing some pro tips on soldering equipment and good practice. In the second part, I'll be applying this info to a simple project, showing how to make a high-quality guitar cable.

IRON MIGHTY

There are various types of soldering iron and it's important to choose the right one for your needs. Pencil-style irons are integrated units with the iron at one end and a wall plug at the other. Most come with a stand, which holds the hot iron while you're in between tasks. This comes in handy if you hope to avoid burning holes in your workbench, carpet or yourself. Don't ask me how I know… I just know. Pencil irons are either on or off, and their operating temperature is fixed. In contrast, soldering stations include an iron and a stand that may or may not be integrated, but the station lets you set the operating temperature of the iron. Some interact with a sensor in the tip, to maintain that temperature.

Soldering guns are another option. They heat up rapidly, but can get too hot and aren't really suitable for delicate work. Gas-powered soldering torches are also available, but they're better suited to fine metalworking and if you're inexperienced, you may end up setting something or somebody on fire. For guitar and amp work, I'd recommend a soldering station with temperature control.

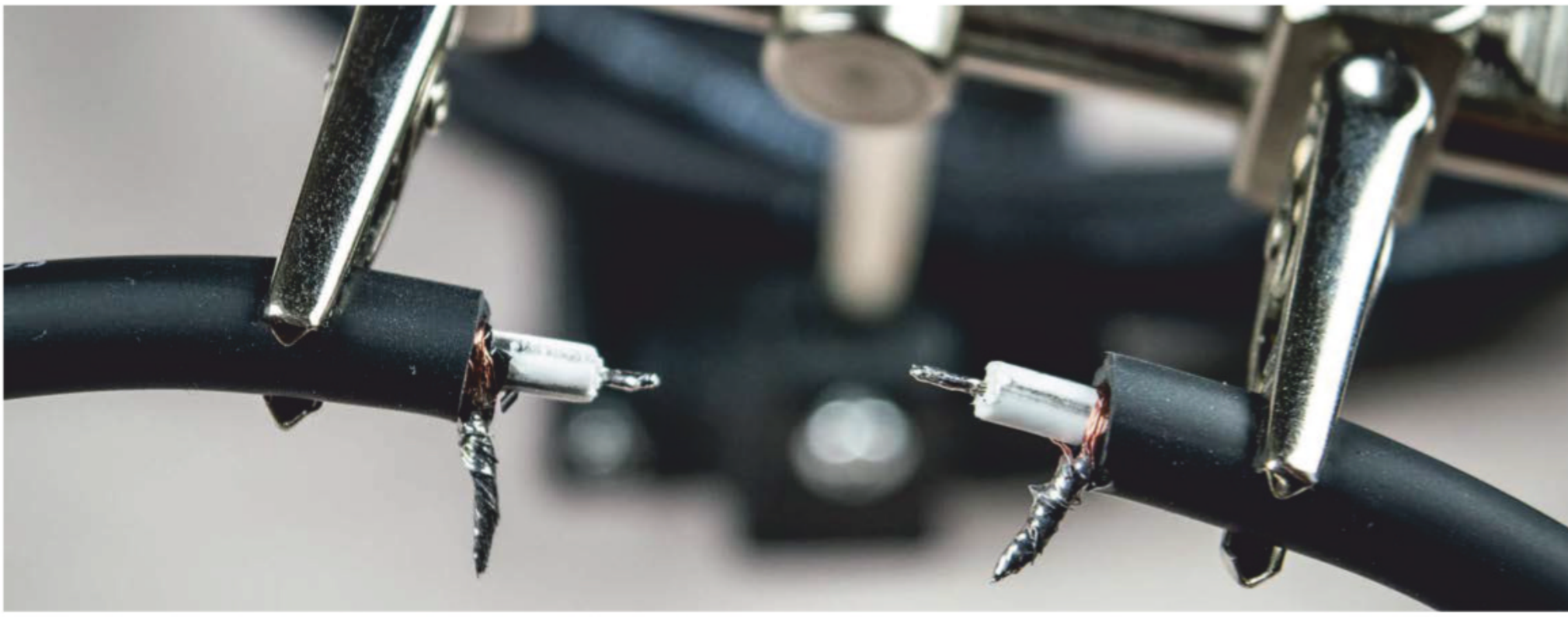
POWER STATIONS

Different soldering jobs require differing amounts of power from a soldering iron. You don't need much power to solder through-hole components onto a printed circuit board, but soldering a ground connection onto an amplifier chassis is beyond the capability of most soldering irons. Common jobs in guitar DIY that require higher power include soldering ground wires onto potentiometer cases and Stratocaster spring claws. In amp building, a fair amount of power will also be required for eyelet and turret-board assembly.

If you have a 15- or 20-watt soldering iron, you probably won't be able to do these jobs, because larger metal parts act as a heatsink, dissipating heat from the iron. When the iron cannot maintain a sufficient temperature, solder cannot melt and flow properly to form a solid joint. You'll also end up holding the iron in situ for a long time and despite there being insufficient heat for soldering, you can still melt plastic parts and damage delicate electronic components. All irons can reach a temperature high enough to melt solder, and higher power doesn't necessarily mean the iron will get hotter; it actually means it can maintain its temperature even when heat is being dissipated. As a rule of thumb, more power is always better and a 50-to-60-watt iron should be sufficient for most jobs.

RIGHT, TO THE WIRE

Solder for electronic applications comes in two varieties – lead-based and lead-free. Increasing



ABOVE TOP The wires are all tinned in preparation for soldering and the electrostatic shield has been stripped back to expose the signal wire's white insulation

ABOVE LEFT These Neutrik plugs break down into four sections – the cover, chuck, boot and the metal plug itself

ABOVE RIGHT The nickel-coloured section slides in and out, allowing you to plug and unplug a guitar silently

LEFT When soldering onto metal objects such as pot casings and plugs, it helps to apply some solder to the object before attempting to connect the wires

NEXT PAGE Using one of these 'helping hands' devices holds everything in position while you're soldering

awareness of the health dangers associated with lead have resulted in legislation restricting the use of lead-based solder in manufacturing.

Leaded solder is usually a 60/40 mix of tin and lead that melts at around 190 degrees celsius and it would have been used in all vintage guitars, pedals and amps. It's still widely sold and it's the best option for restoration work. 63/37 leaded solder is also available and its faster transition from liquid to solid can reduce the risk of 'cold' solder joints – where parts move before the solder has solidified.

Lead-free solder has a higher melting point, so it's a bit harder to use and you'll need a powerful soldering iron. It's an alloy of tin, silver and copper, and although lead-free solder joints can be stronger, they can be more brittle, too.

The law requires manufacturers to use lead-free solder and you may opt to do the same on health grounds. On the other hand, if you do relatively little soldering and much of it involves maintenance and repair of older equipment, you may choose to stick with leaded solder. I've used both and since I prefer leaded, I often use a small extractor fan that draws solder fumes into a carbon filter.

Electrical solder has embedded rosin flux, which dissolves metal oxide, helps the solder to flow and promotes bonding with metal parts. Plumbing solder has acid flux and it's unsuitable for electronics. Various solder-wire gauges are available, but I find 0.7mm fine for most applications.

TOP TIPS

Better-quality soldering irons allow you to change tips. This is important for two reasons – firstly, tips wear out and secondly, different tip shapes can be used depending on the job at hand.

Fine and sharp conically shaped tips are ideal for precision work, such as soldering PCB sockets. Some tips look more like small chisels and others look more like flathead screwdrivers. When soldering onto potentiometer casings, where you need to distribute the heat over a wider area, a flatter tip is preferable.

Whichever tip you use, it's advisable to keep it in good condition. When you're struggling to make solder joints and molten solder falls off the iron, it indicates that the tip has become oxidised. If it looks dull and black rather than silver and shiny, that's almost certainly the case. Contaminants on the tip can also get into the solder joint and cause it to fail.

Get into the habit of cleaning solder tips as you work. Most iron holders have a tray section that contains a sponge that should be dampened with water before you start work. Wiping the tip on the damp (not wet) sponge after each solder joint removes excess solder from the tip. Some prefer to use brass or stainless-steel wool to clean iron tips to prevent oxidisation.

After every few joints, it's advisable to wipe the iron clean, apply fresh solder to the tip and wipe off the excess. This prevents the tip from oxidising and it should also be done at the end of a job before you switch the iron off. The process is called 'tinning' and a healthy iron tip should look shiny. You should also tin new tips before using them.

If you feel your tip is no longer working properly and cleaning and tinning doesn't help, you have a couple of options. You may try treating it with tip activator, or simply replace it. Tips are relatively inexpensive, but you must get the right one for your iron.

DON'T BLOW IT

Solder shouldn't be considered 'metal glue', which is simply wiped on with the iron and allow to set. Solder needs to flow onto the parts to make a good joint and this requires proper soldering technique.

Whether it's a resistor leg sticking through an eyelet or a hole in a printed circuit board, or capacitor leadout wires wrapped around a turret or tag, the iron should be used to heat the area where the joint is being made. With the area pre-heated and iron tip still touching the work, bring the solder into contact with the joint.

It should melt and flow almost instantaneously and the key here is that the solder flows into the joint rather than forms a blob on the surface. Do not try and melt solder onto the iron tip and then transfer it onto the joint, because the flux that helps the solder to bond will have evaporated before doing its job.

Knowing what temperature to set and how long to preheat the area comes with experience. Leaded solder melts at around 190°C and lead free at around 200°C. With printed circuit boards, an iron temperature of about 325°C should be a safe starting point,

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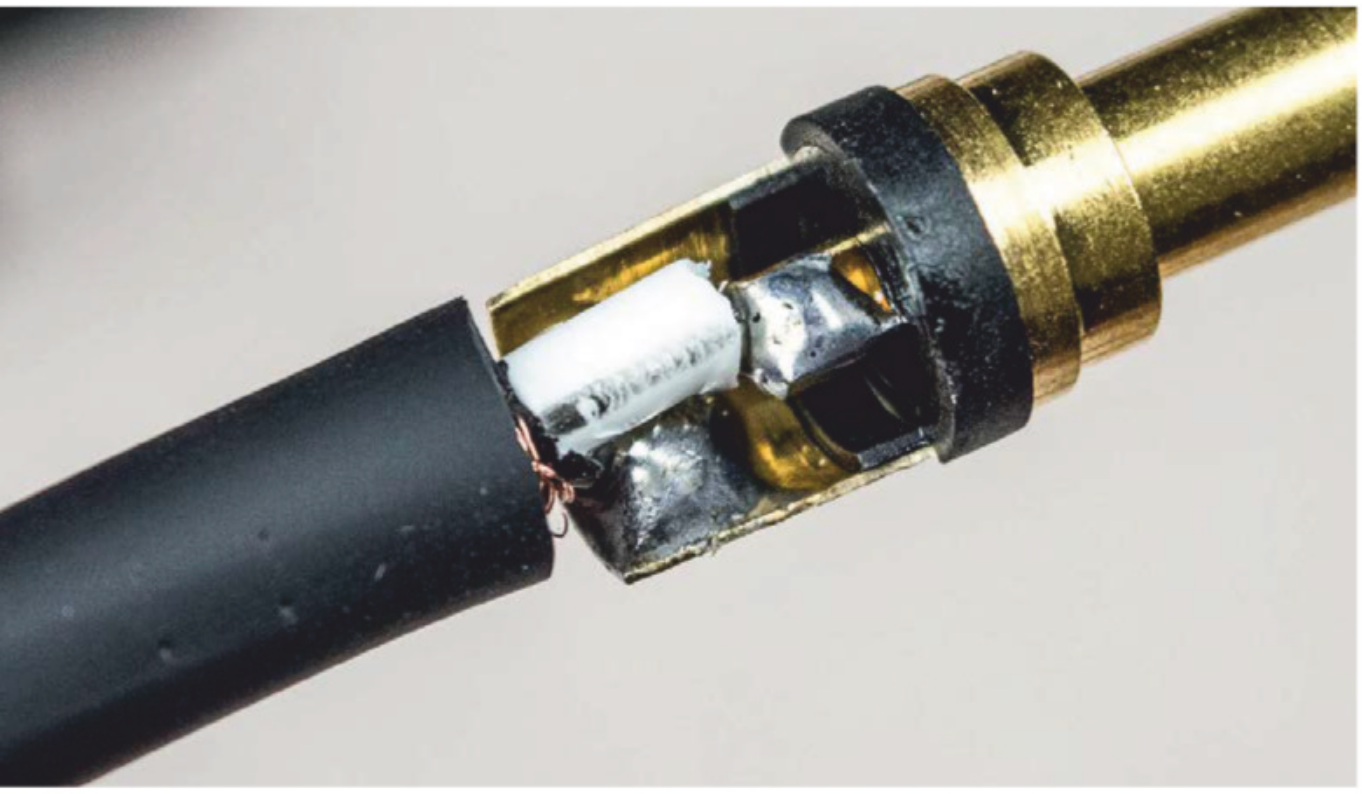

because it's imperative not to damage the board. If you find it isn't sufficient, then up the temperature to 350°C and try again.

Higher temperatures are needed for potentiometers, turrets and eyelets and there's no harm in starting at a low temperature then increasing it if the solder is taking a while to melt and flow. Experienced solderers often prefer to work with irons set at 400°C or above, to get in and out in a couple of seconds.

Once the solder has flowed, remove the iron and allow the joint to cool naturally. Resist the temptation to blow on the solder to hasten the process. When soldering transistors and op-amps, try attaching a crocodile clip to the legs. It will act as a heatsink, to draw heat away from delicate components.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN GUITAR CABLE

If you're new to soldering, making cables is a great way to gain experience. It's also fairly cheap and relatively risk-free. Besides a soldering iron and some solder, all you really need is some suitable cable and a couple of quarter-inch plugs.

YOU CAN'T TEACH AN OLD DOG NEUTRIKS

There are plenty of places to buy instrument cable and I bought the Sommer SC-Spirit LLX Low-Loss Instrument Cable used in this project from a well-known online auction site. Rather than choose by brand name or colour, I look for capacitance-per-metre and outside diameter.

Capacitance is important, because lower capacitance equates to less treble rolloff. Although some prefer the treble 'sweetening' effect of high-capacitance cables, others prefer transferring as much audio information as possible from guitar to amp.

The Sommer cable's capacitance is given as 52pF per metre and as instrument cables go, that's pretty low.

Outside diameter is a consideration because the cable has to be compatible with the plugs you plan on using. For this project, I have Neutrik plugs – an NP2X-B and an NP2X-AU. The latter is a 'silent' jack, which means you can plug and unplug your guitar without hearing any unwanted noise through your amp. These Neutrik plugs can accommodate cables up to 8.5mm in diameter and since the Sommer cable is 8mm, it will just fit.

ON THE WIRE

Professionals use wire strippers, but if you're careful, you can get by with a craft knife. The first task is to strip off the black outer layer of insulation but before doing so, I push on the threaded boot that will eventually screw onto the rear of the plug. Don't forget, otherwise you'll have to de-solder your plug and do the whole job again.

Next, I carefully score around the cable about 15mm from the end, taking care not to cut into the braided shielding layer. The black outer layer pulls off to reveal the copper shielding. I use a small screwdriver tip to untangle the shielding wires, which are then pulled to one side and twisted together.

The centre signal wires are covered by a white plastic insulation layer, with a very thin black electrostatic shield that discharges static and keeps cables crackle-free. It's important to strip this layer away from the exposed centre insulation.

I use a wire-stripper tool to expose about 4mm of the centre conductor, but you can use a blade instead, if you're careful. Again, the exposed wires are twisted together and I repeat the whole procedure at the other end of the cable.

The twisted wires must be impregnated with solder – the aforementioned process also known as tinning. This is essential for achieving strong solder joints. I set my iron to about 375°C and touch the heated tip against the wires for a couple of seconds before adding the solder.

If the twisted wires are hot enough, the solder flows in quickly. But take care, because it's easy to melt the insulation by accident if you leave the iron there too long. With all four twisted wires properly tinned, attention turns to the plugs.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

To make the solder connections as easy as possible, I apply solder to the plugs in advance. I allow the solder to flow and pool up on the surface at the back of the plugs where the shield wires will attach and the small cupped recesses where the centre wires are soldered.

If you try holding a plug in your hand while you're soldering onto it, you'll burn yourself. Instead, use a vice, tape the plug onto a heat-resistant surface or use a soldering clamp with crocodile clips like the one in the pictures. The gaps between the clips can be altered by sliding them along a bar, and this makes it very easy to position the cable and the plug while

you're making the solder joints. I ensure that I solder the shield connections first, followed by the centre wire.

CLOSING UP

Neutrik's instructions stipulate that the end of the plastic chuck needs to be snapped off when the cable's outer diameter exceeds 5mm. Once done, I clip the chuck onto the cable and slide it over the solder joints. The jack's outer cover is slipped over the plug section and the boot slides up to meet it before they are screwed together.

In the process, the chuck tightens around the cable to hold it firmly and ensure there's never any physical strain to compromise the solder joints. If you have made it this far, you can test your new cable using a multimeter – or simply plug it into your amp and see if it works. If it doesn't, either one or more solder joints has failed, or the shield and signal wires are shorted. This is usually the result of stray shield wires that escaped tinning. But the chances are that it *will* work, and will continue to do so for many years.

FACING PAGE TOP The shield is soldered to the plug casing before the signal wire is soldered onto the centre section

FACING PAGE BOTTOM The chuck is positioned over the solder joints and we're ready to slip the cover over the plug and screw it onto the boot

ABOVE The cable is finished, it sounds clear and noise-free – and the silent plug works really well

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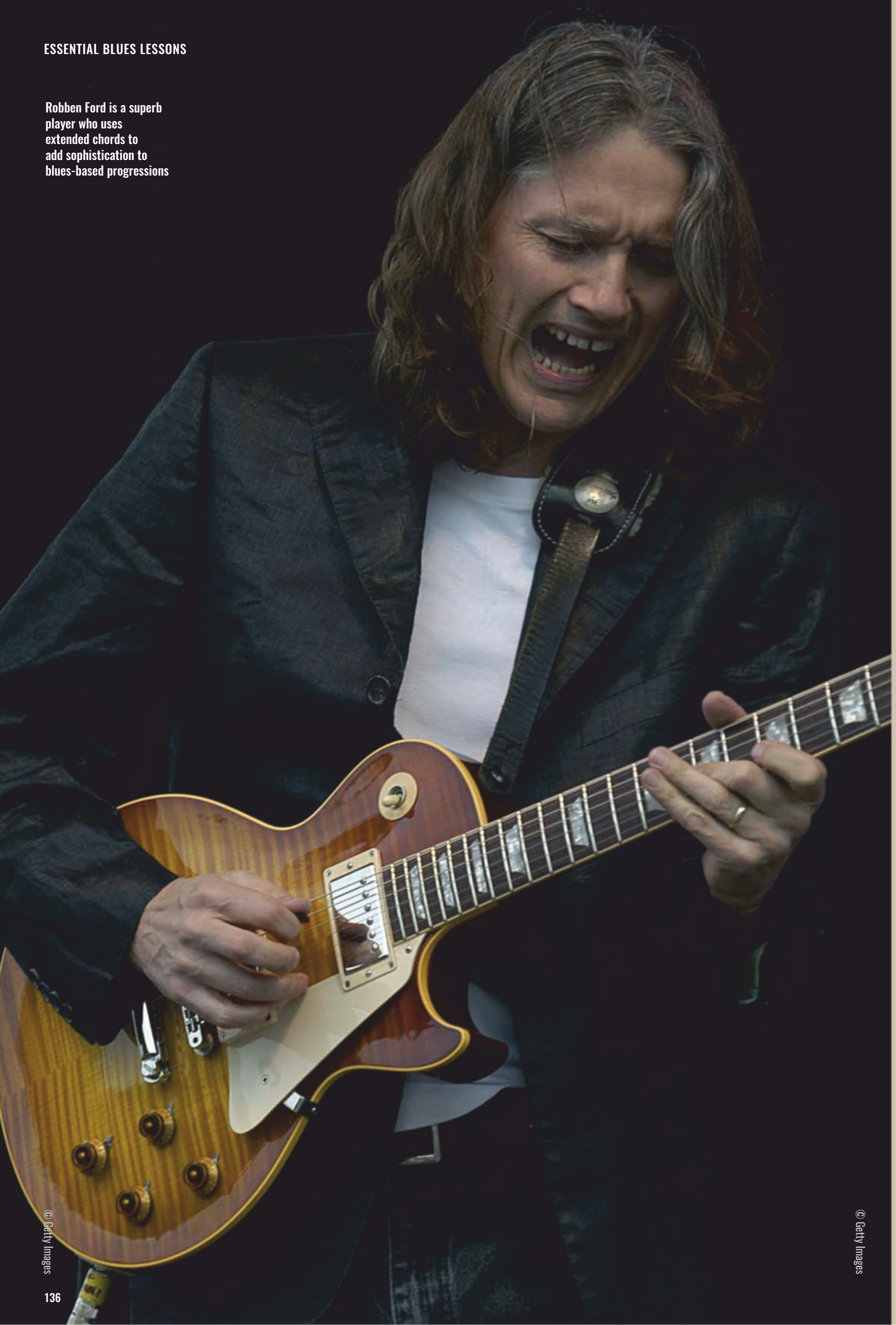
Robben Ford is a superb player who uses extended chords to add sophistication to blues-based progressions



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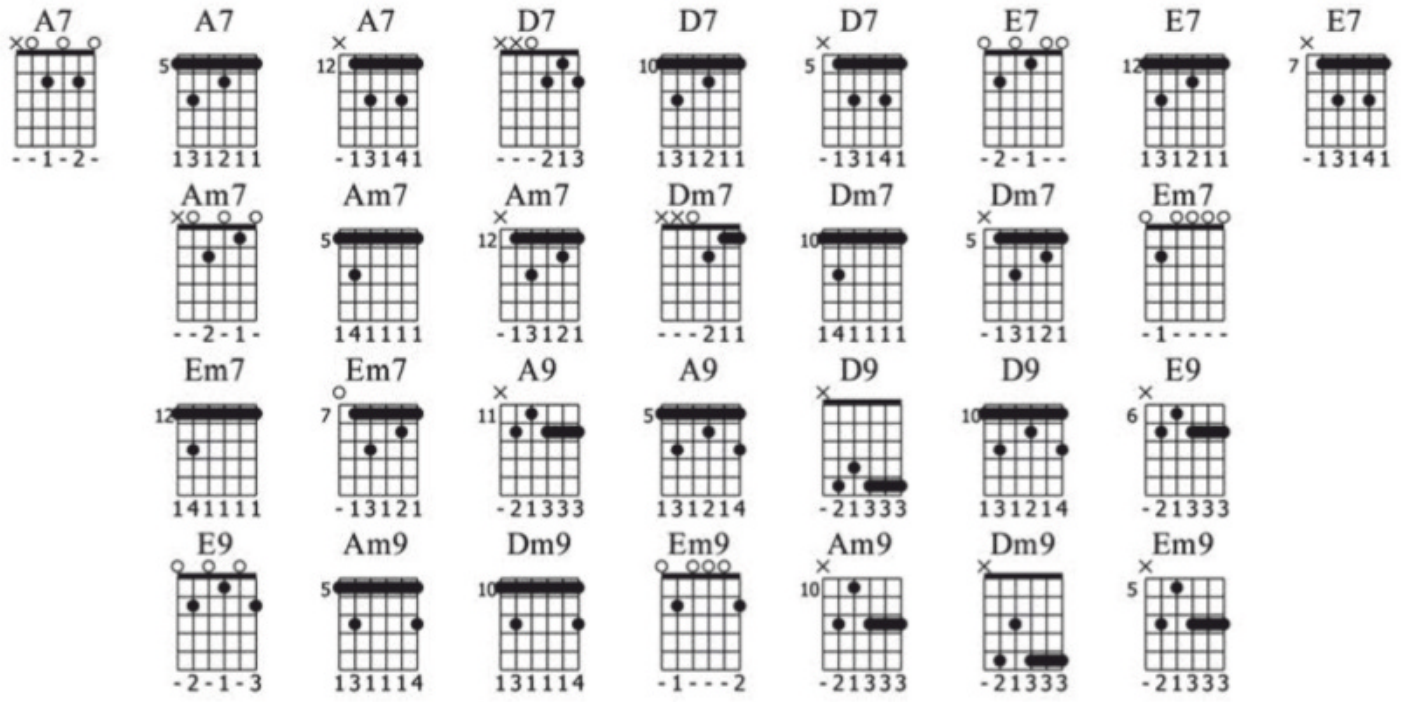
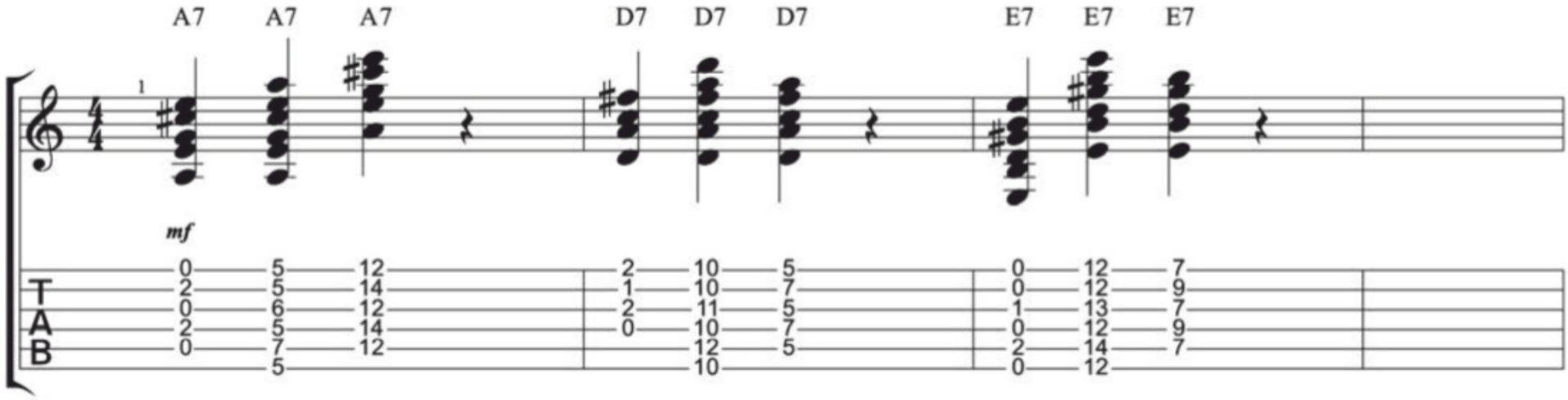
CHORD EXTENSIONS



DOMINANT 7TH CHORDS



ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART THREE CHORD EXTENSIONS

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

In the third part of our tuition series teaching you how to become a better blues player, we show you how to add notes to the simple chords we've played so far, to add different voicings and character to your blues rhythms

In the last instalment of this lesson, we looked at turning a few simple chords into a fully fledged blues shuffle. Now that you're getting your blues playing off to a great start, it's time to talk about chord extensions. When we talk about chord extensions, this refers to notes that you can add to chords to enhance their harmonic depth and give them a new flavour. We'll be looking at four new types of chords in this lesson: dominant 7th, minor 7th, dominant 9th and minor 9th, which are great for giving your blues rhythm playing some extra depth and sophistication. Sticking with the key of A, we will once again be calling our intervals from the A major scale (see below). We'll also be sticking with the I, IV and V chords we used in the previous two lessons:

I = A IV = D V = E

All the chord extensions in this lesson will be based on these chords. Let's look at a few extensions that are great for blues playing.

7TH CHORDS

7th chords are created by adding a variation of the 7th interval of the major scale onto a pre-existing major or minor chord.

DOMINANT 7TH

Dominant 7th chords are made up of the I, III, V and ♭VII intervals of a major scale. For example, an A dominant 7th chord would be made up of:

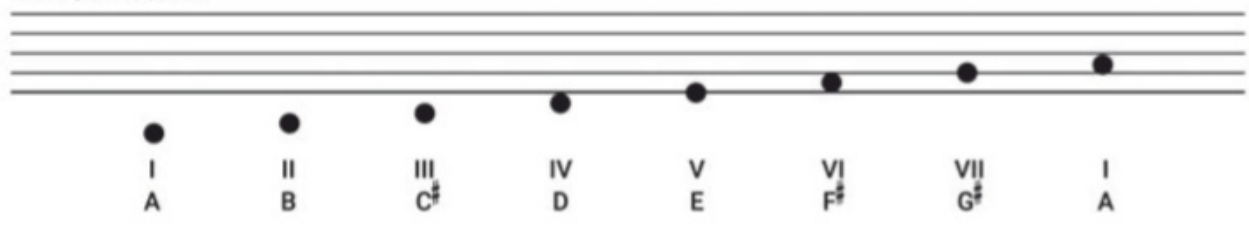
I = A III = C♯ V = E ♭VII = G

The dominant 7 chord shares the I, III, V trial of a major chord, with an added flattened 7th note. The VII note in our scale is a G♯. As a dominant 7th chord requires the VII to be flattened, this gives us a G note.

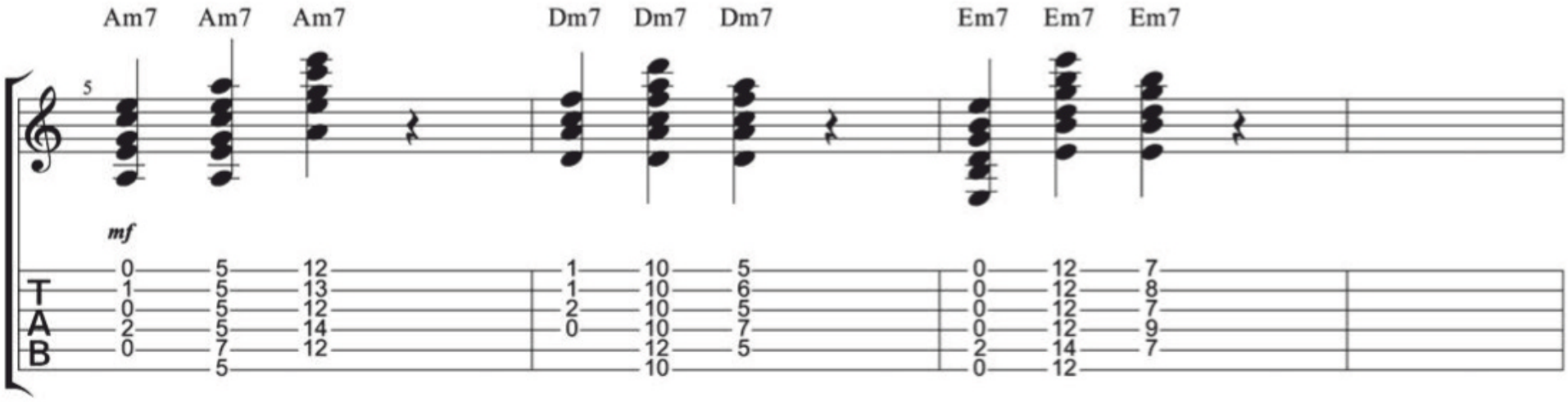
MINOR 7TH

Minor 7th chords are made up of the I, ♭III, V and ♭VII intervals of a major scale. An A minor 7th chord would be made up of:

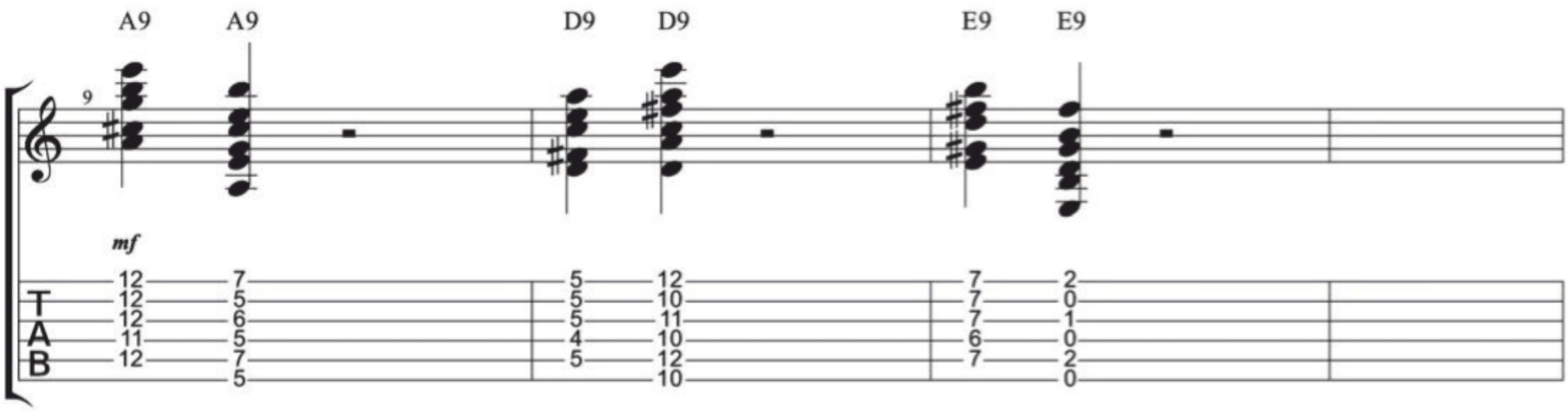
A MAJOR SCALE



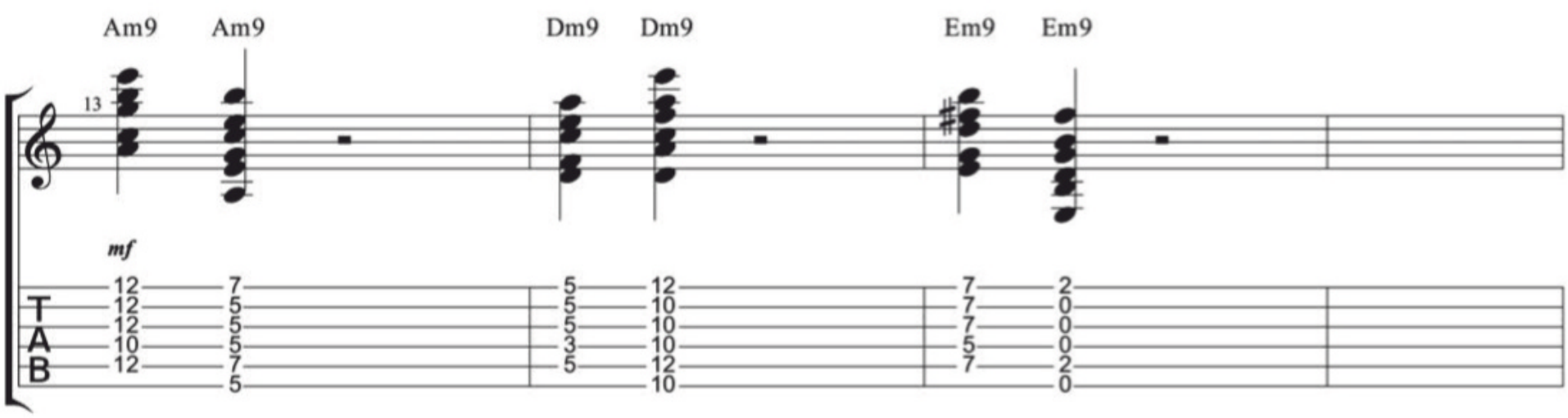
MINOR 7TH CHORDS



9TH CHORDS



MINOR 9TH CHORDS



I = A ♭III = C V = E ♭VII = G

The minor 7th chord is a minor chord triad (I ♭III V) with an added ♭VII note. This chord is great for adding a sombre vibe.

9TH CHORDS

9th chords are created by adding a variation of the 9th interval of the major scale onto a pre-existing 7th chord. While the major scale only has seven intervals before we find ourselves back at the root note again, if we count our octave note as the 8th interval of the scale, we can extend the scale through the second octave, meaning our 9th interval is the same note as our second interval, but one octave higher (in the case of A major, it's a B note).

DOMINANT 9TH

Dominant 9th chords comprise the I, III, V, ♭VII and IX intervals of a major scale. A dominant 9th chord would be made up of:

I = A III = C# V = E ♭VII = G IX = B

The dominant 9th chord is a dominant 7th chord with an added 9th note. The IX note in our scale is a B (which is the same as our second interval).

MINOR 9TH

Minor 9th chords are made up of the I, ♭III, V, ♭VII and IX intervals of a major scale. An A minor 9th chord is made up of:

I = A ♭III = C V = E ♭VII = G IX = B

The minor 9th chord shares the same shape as the dominant 7th, with the major-third note flattened to make the chord a minor.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Take the 12-bar blues rhythms you've been using for the last few weeks and swap some of the chords for these new extended voicings. You'll notice a new depth to the rhythmic track. The dominant 9th chord is a great way to add a funk edge to your blues. Or, if you really want to get moody, the minor 7th chords will give your blues a mournful overtone – perfect for long, slow, weeping guitar solos.

The A, D and E chords used in this lesson are there to keep things in context with the previous lessons, but these ideas are transposable. Try to work out some extensions to other chords in different keys.

In the next lesson, we will take a look at some slow-blues progressions using these chords and explore various rhythms and techniques we can apply to make our 12-bar really capture the desired mood.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK with over 10 years of experience. He's taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. To find a qualified guitar tutor in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

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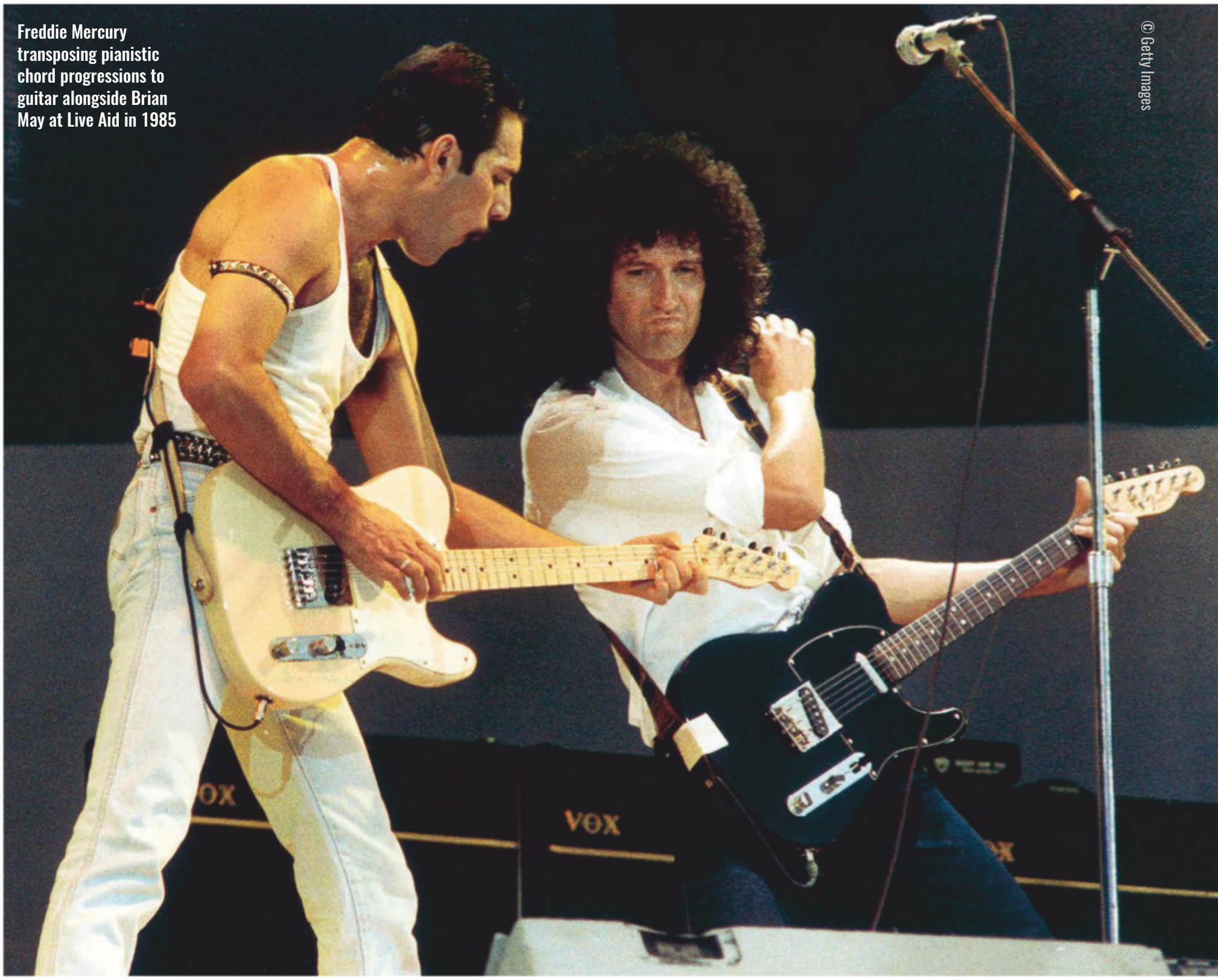


Freddie Mercury transposing pianistic chord progressions to guitar alongside Brian May at Live Aid in 1985

© Getty Images

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY QUEEN-STYLE CHORDS

WORDS ROD FOGG

For a rock band, Queen came out with some outlandish chord sequences – but they were often played on piano. Let's see if we can adapt them for the guitar…

The four-chord song is everywhere these days, but it has become something of a cliché, with comedy bands on YouTube stringing together medleys of songs which can all be played over the same harmonic progression. Rewind back to the 1970s and we find songs by Queen, and particularly those by vocalist/pianist Freddie Mercury, which make use of dozens of different chords. Though originating on piano, this kind of chord sequence can be played on guitar by plucking the bass note with the thumb, to mimic the pianist's left hand, and using the index and middle and ring fingers to play the upper notes of the chord, which would be played by the pianist's right hand.

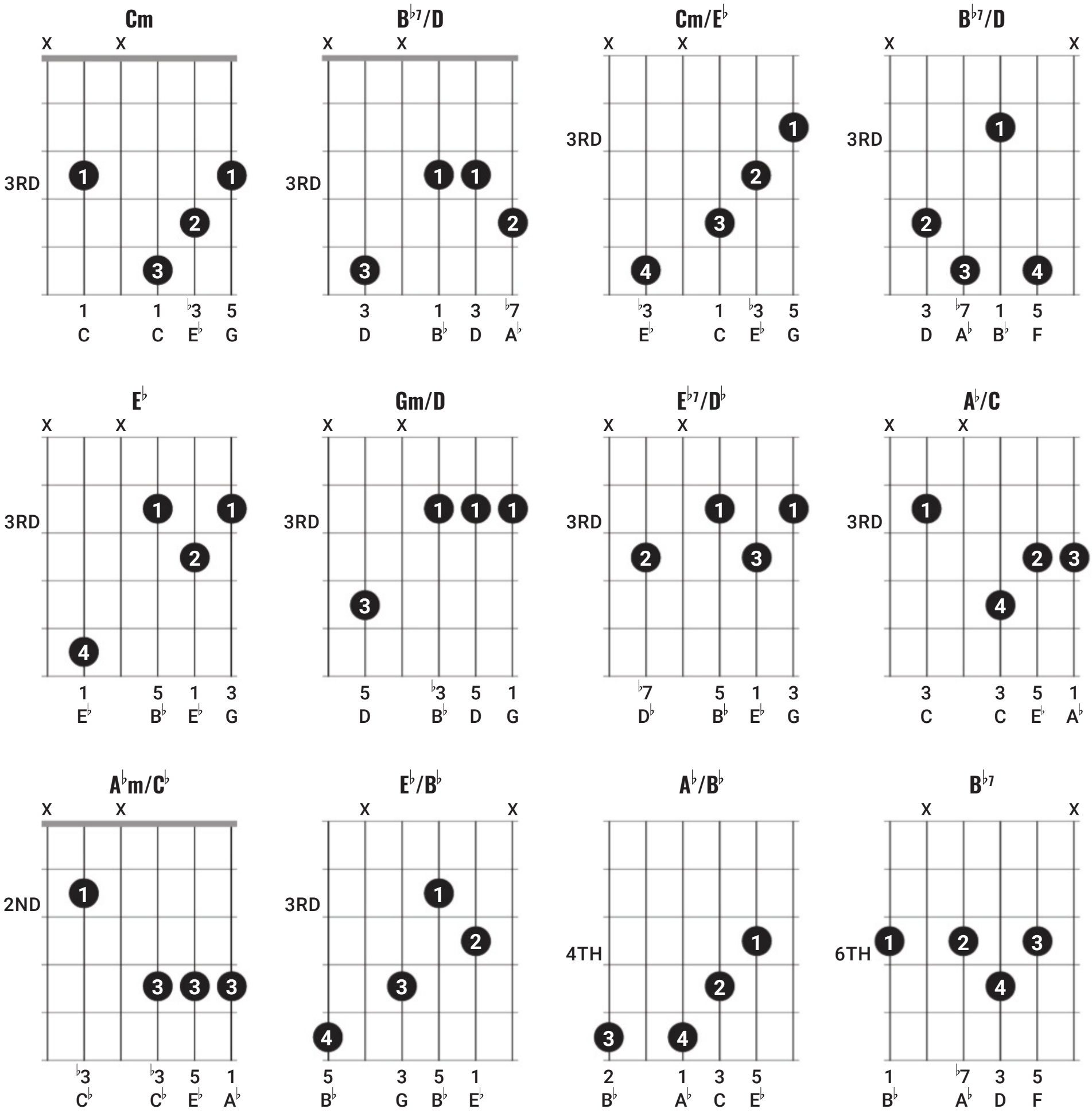
Figure 1 gets us started, with a sequence of 12 chords; in a typical Queen song, these 12 chords might represent no more than the first eight bars of a verse. Play all four notes of each chord at once, using fingerstyle as described above, and slightly staccato. The first four chords get four beats each and the remaining eight chords get just two beats each, making an eight-bar sequence.

The 'cut-off' effect of staccato can be achieved either by releasing the pressure from the fret hand, but leaving the fingers in touch with the strings, or by damping the strings with the pick-hand fingers shortly before re-picking the chord. See which approach works best for you.

It's possible to play this exercise with a pick, but you have to be careful to mute any unwanted notes. For example, in the Cm chord, the index finger needs to be arched so that it holds down the fifth (A) string and the sixth (E) string, but not the fourth (D) string. For B♭7/D, the underside of finger three can be used to mute the D string. There are many similar solutions available in the subsequent chords.

This chord sequence is not a transcription of any particular song, but it is inspired by the kind of voicings found in a typical Queen piano part. Notice how the bassline between the first four chords keeps things moving forwards, as does the powerful descending line from the E♭ chord all the way to E♭/B♭ and B♭ seven. Also, the third and fourth chords are essentially a re-voicing of the first two chords to add interest. As

FIGURE 1



we go, be prepared to come across some unfamiliar chord shapes which might need some careful practising. Tricky changes can be worked on separately back and forth; you don't always have to try and play the whole eight bars.

Figure 2 could be played as a series of arpeggios, each time picking with the thumb on the bass note and then with the other three fingers on the remaining notes of the chord. If you take away the slash chords, you're left with a four-chord sequence similar to those found in contemporary pop songs – however, leaving them in place creates a set of changes which seems to owe something to the Baroque period and the music of Bach. It works as either a four- or eight-bar sequence and can be effectively looped around.

A more pianistic approach to this chord sequence would be to play the bass note with the thumb, the note on the fourth (D) string with the index finger, and then use the middle and ring fingers to play the notes

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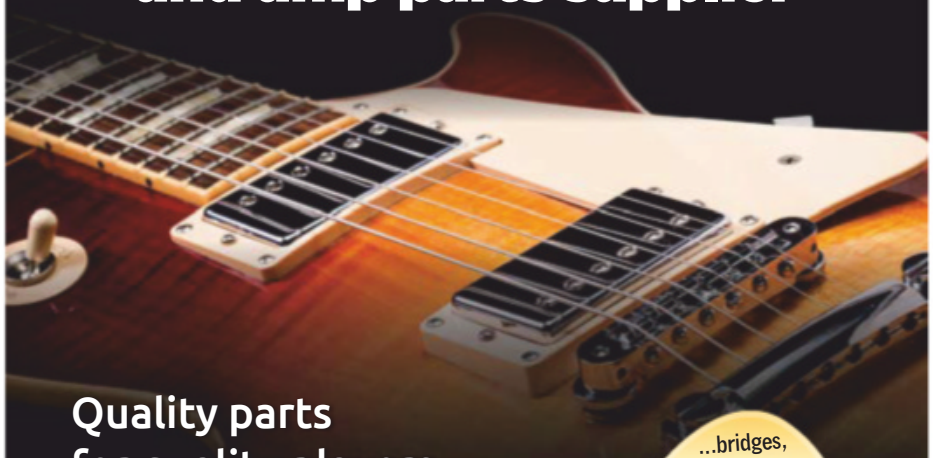
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FIGURE 2

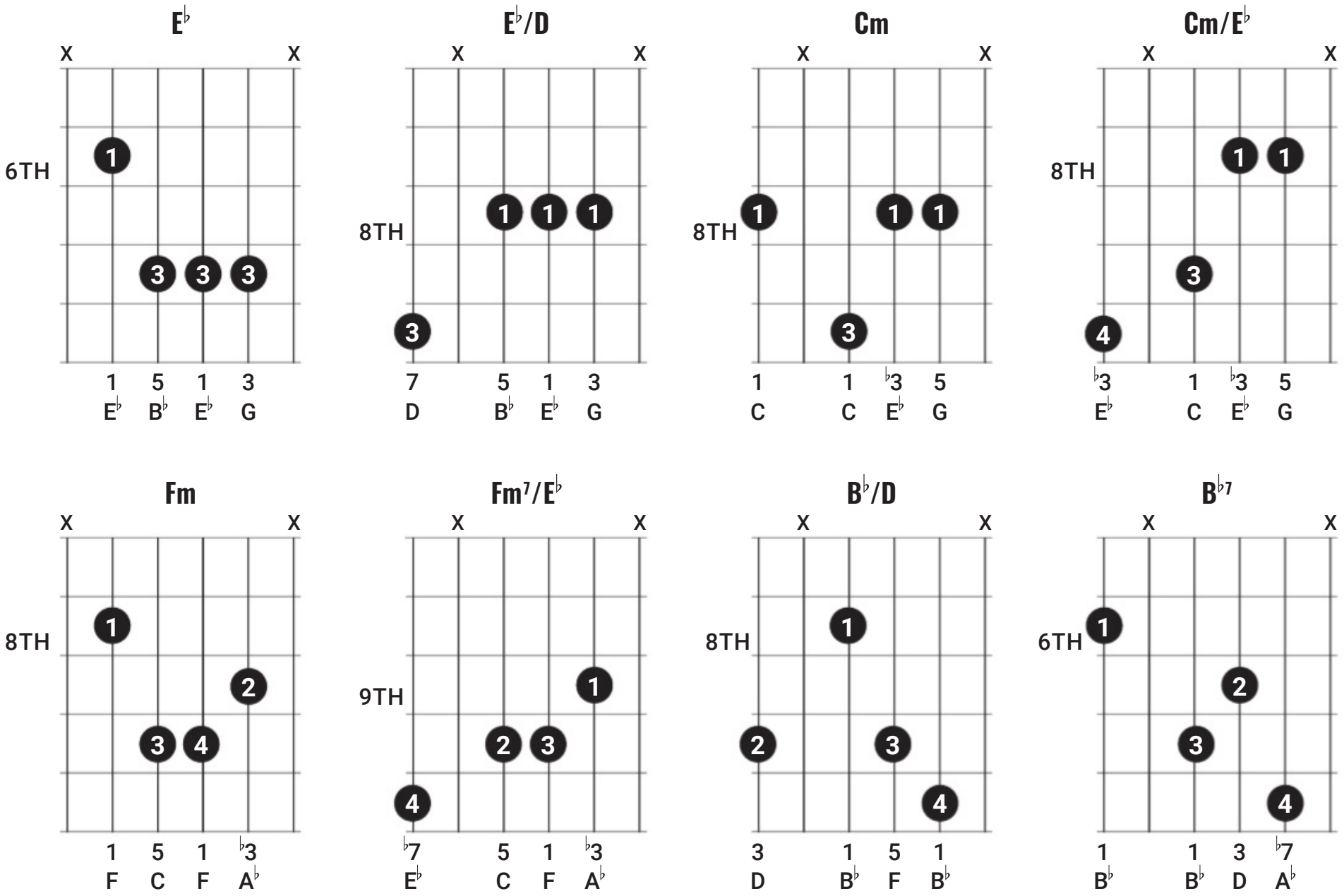
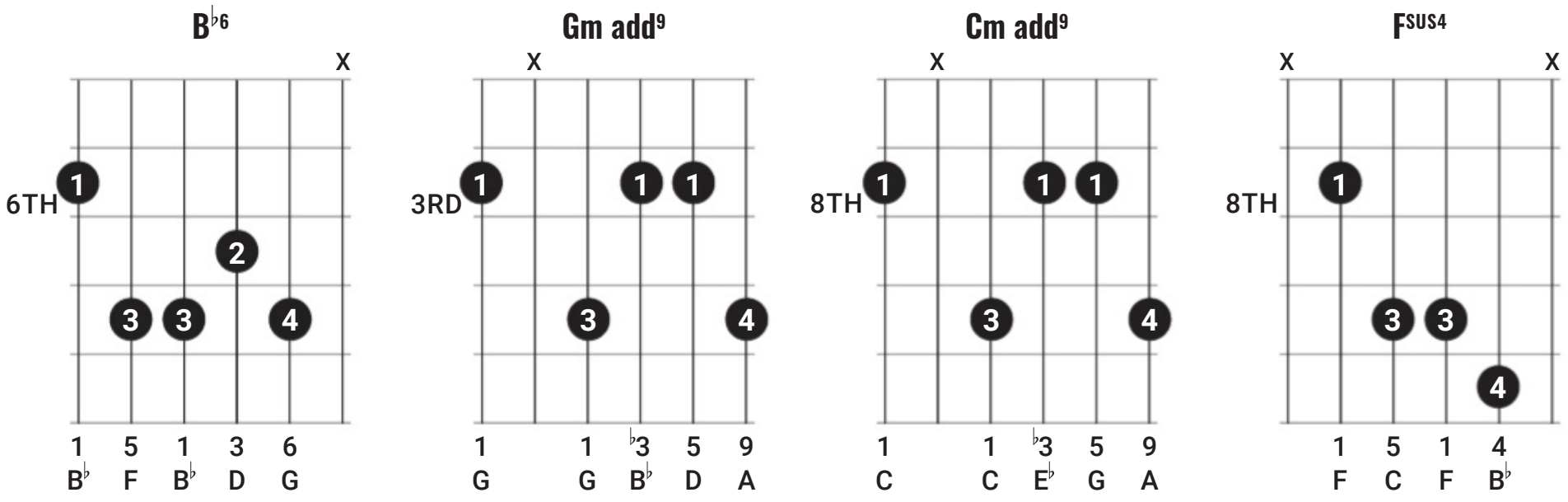


FIGURE 3



on the third (G) and second (B) strings simultaneously before finally picking the note on the fourth (D) string again with the index finger. This works for the whole sequence and will help to bring out the strong bassline. Notice Figures 1 and 2 both end on B♭7, but with two different voicings.

Figure 3 introduces the idea of stopping two strings with one finger in the B♭6 chord. Play this chord as an arpeggio, from the bass note to the top note, then release the little finger and pick the note which is held down by the barre on the second (B) string, sixth fret. For the Gm add9 and Cm add9 chords, pick the notes of the chord and then release the little finger, picking the note under the barre on the first (E) string. Finally, the Fsus4 chord can be made into F major either by sliding the little finger down a fret or by stopping three strings with the third finger. Like figure 2, these four chords make a repeatable sequence. For extra fun, try recording each sequence and playing a Brian May-style solo over the top!

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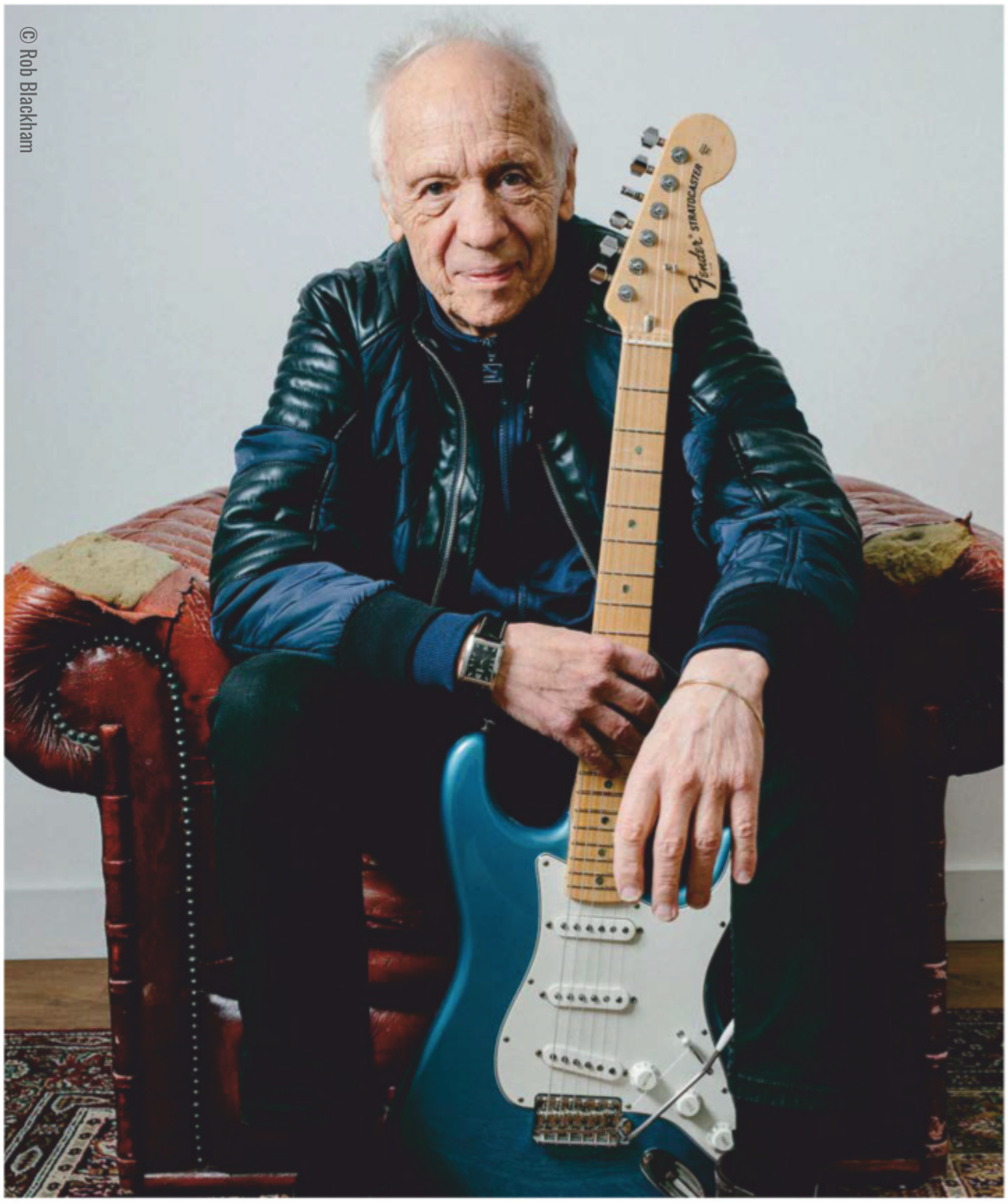

TALKBOX

ROBIN TROWER

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The former Procul Harum guitarist on 50s Strats, taking it slow, 1930s jazz singers – and avoiding fire extinguisher-toting stage hands…

The moment it all started…
"Well, I wanted to play guitar because I was a big fan of Scotty Moore who played for Elvis, so he was the impetus. Then I asked my dad for a guitar, and he bought me a guitar for Christmas – I think I was about 14 at the time, so that's when it started!"

I couldn't live without my…
"I really don't have one of those sort of guitars. I have a few of my signature-model Strats – I switch among three of those as to which of them is my favourite, so one of them!"

In another life, I'd have been…
"I think I would have been an unemployed wastrel. I can't think of anything else I would have done – I'm not good in any other avenue!"

The one that got away…
"I did have a '56 Strat with a maple neck that was stolen, and that was a wonderful instrument. But I don't know if I'd still be playing it today, that's the thing – but still, it was a truly beautiful guitar."

If I could be in any band, it would be…
"I think probably the band that James Brown had for his *Live At The Apollo* album. That is some of my all-time favourite music. I don't think I would have been good enough to play in that band, but it would have been a lovely experience!"

The best advice I've ever been given…
"I can't remember any advice, really… I'm self-taught. But when people ask me for advice, I always say if you're a young player just starting out, what I found in my own beginnings was not to try to copy other guitar players. By copying you can seem to get further forward more quickly, but it's better if you take a slower route and develop more organically. And that's not to say you don't have influences – all my influences are still with me, but by not sitting down and working out what other players are doing and enjoying playing music for yourself, you're more likely to come up with something that's a bit more original."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar…
"More often than not, I'll play one of my slower songs. I tend to prefer the slower things. There's a track off the new album called *Ghosts*, and even though I'm just practising at home, I just really like playing that – it gets me warmed up."

The most important thing on my rider…
"I think probably just tea and honey!"

If I could just play one thing…
"I do enjoy listening to other artists, but to be honest about it, I only really enjoy playing my own music. There's artists that I listen to over and over again – I still play early Howlin' Wolf all the time. The mystique of it just blows me away, but I have no impulse at all to do one of his songs or anything, there doesn't seem to be any point! The only covers I've done of songs is when I've rearranged them and put my own spin on it. It has to be my own thing, really."

My guilty pleasure…
"I really like Al Bowlly music from the 30s, in particular, and that period of popular music. I think it appeals to the romantic side of my character, y'know? And a variety of artists from that period – it's not just the singers, but the musicianship is so good, and the arrangements. It's very rich music."

My Spinal Tap moment…
"I think it was probably when I was playing with Jack Bruce up in Scotland, and my amp caught fire. And then someone from the crew in the theatre rushed on with a fire extinguisher to try to put it out! Luckily, my guitar tech grabbed him and said: 'No! No! We don't want that!' [laughs] That was a very surreal moment, but I always ran two heads anyway, so I still finished the gig."

Robin Trower's new album, *Coming Closer To The Day*, is out 22 March on Provogue

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